The Joyous Guests

MAUD LINDSAY
EMILIE POULSSON

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THE JOYOUS GUESTS

BY MAUD LINDSAY AND EMILIE POULSSON

". . . When Christmas time had come a goodly company of Joyous Guests gathered around the Squire's hearth." And these are some of the stories they told during the twelve nights of Christmas-tide.

Once upon a time there was a tinker, who very much annoyed all his friends and neighbors with his silly boasting. One night he met a huge giant "waiting in the lane . . . . What the giant's body was like, the tinker could not tell, for it was a black night; but his great round head with fiery eyes and grinning mouth was all too plain to see." It is easy to guess what the giant's head was made of, but you will laugh to read what the terrified tinker did when he saw this monster.

Then there is a strange story about a king and his dog. Luarth was one of the bravest and most faithful dogs that ever lived. When his master, the king, was driven from his throne and the conquerors returned to occupy the palace, can you imagine who they found sitting upon the throne? It was none other than Luarth, the king's dog. The people were pleased to see how intelligent the dog was and they hailed him as king. So for a time Luarth helped to rule the country. You will be amused at his cleverness in dealing with the crafty counsellors, and you will be happy to know that he saved many innocent people from punishment by declaring them not guilty. Quite unexpectedly it was King Dog who brought his master, the real king, back to the throne—but that part of the story you must read for yourself.

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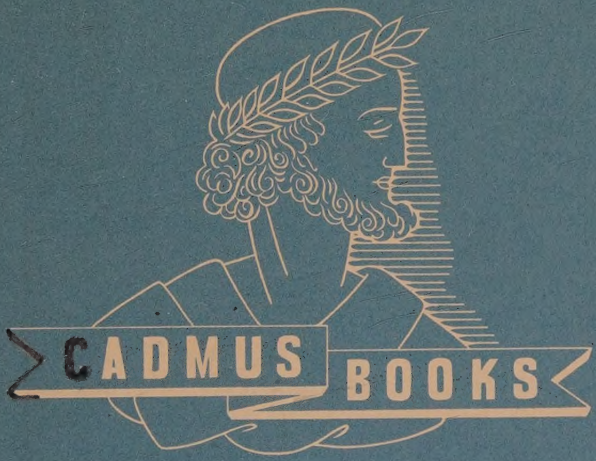
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BOOKS

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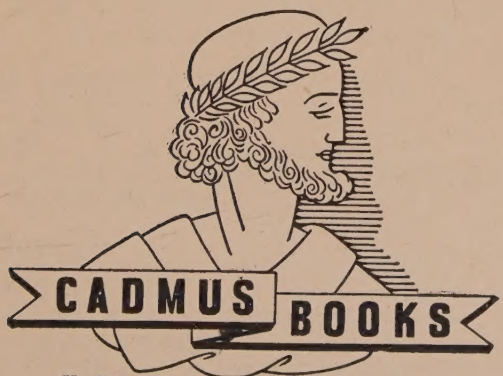

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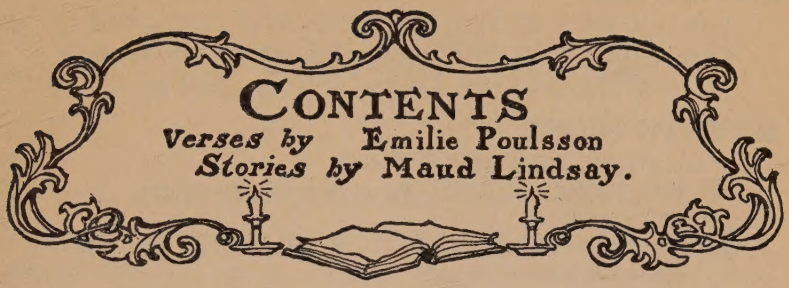

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The Joyous Guests

Once when the berries were red on the holly-trees, and the Christmas geese were fattening in the pen, a certain Squire of the North Country bent his mind to hospitable plans.

"The Christmas pie," quoth he, "will taste the better if its plums are shared with guests. A full house, a heaping board, and a roaring fire at Christmas-tide, say I; and a long life to Father Christmas!"

So he bade his Lady write by post ("and let the post be quick," said he) to summon friends from far and near to keep high holiday with him and his.

Thus it befell that when the Christmas time had come a goodly company of Joyous Guests gathered around the Squire's hearth, to wit:

A neighboring Justice and his wife.

Their troop of rosy children who, with the Squire's Little Son, kept the house filled with merriment, and were the plague and delight of Nurse, the all-important dame whose charge they were.

An Eton schoolboy, nephew of the Squire, a lad of parts but mischief's very self.

My Lady's Bachelor Cousin who had all the family history by heart.

A Vicar who was godly but not over-grave.

Two youthful Sisters and their Aunt who had come

long miles to keep a promise made the Squire once when they were Joyous Travelers on the London road. And never warmer welcome than the Squire's waited at journey's end,—nor better cheer.

The Aunt brought with her a Scotch Maid who shared the welcome and the cheer. Aye, every one in the Squire's house, from the most honored guest to the small lad who served the cook, had part and place in all the Christmas jollity.

And for twelve merry nights with songs and tales and games the Christmas festival was kept.

First Night

THE YULE LOG

In dim gray light of Christmas morn,
The Yule Log to the Hall was borne.
Hail, Christmas Log!

Now was its time of honor nigh,
And jolly men with boist'rous cry,
Guffaws of laughter, lusty mirth,
Had bound with ropes its monstrous girth
All greenly decked; and placed thereon
The Squire's laughing Little Son.
Hail, Christmas Log!

With eyes a-sparkle, cheeks aflame,
He rode in state until they came
Unto the Hall's great hearth at last;
Then "Ho, heave ho!" the Log was cast
With mighty effort far inside
The yawning chimney's cavern wide.
Hail, Christmas Log!

Holding a bit of half-charred wood,
From last year's Yule Log, waiting stood
The Squire, who loved the olden rite
And would himself the Yule Log light.
And Christmas unto Christmas sent
Its warmth and cheer and merriment

When, this torch set ablaze, the Squire
Kindled another Christmas fire.
Hail, Christmas Log!

Right merrily the fire burned
And when came nightfall, hither turned
The company of Joyous Guests
Agog for evening sports and jests.
But scarcely were they seated round
On bench, stool, settle, than the sound
Of piping childish voice outbroke.
(It was the Little Son who spoke.)
"A tale! Now for a tale!" cried he.
All smiled assent. "But who shall be
The teller of the tale?" asked one.
Then said the Squire's Little Son,
Clapping his hands, "Nay, I will show.
Good rhymes for 'counting out' I know."

With jingling rhyme, around the room
He sped; and lo! the playful doom
Fell on the Justice, man of law,
Whom all the County held in awe.
The Little Son drew back dismayed,
But with a smile the Justice said,
"Thy 'counting out' was fair, I trow
And I will tell a tale right now."

KING DOG

There was once a King who had for a pet a great dog. And the love between the two was as strong as the love between friends.

Wherever the King went the dog followed. He lay at the King's door at night and stood beside his throne in the council-chamber, and did the King's bidding like a faithful servant.

The King had a collar of gold made for the dog's neck and on the collar was written so that all might read, "This is Luarth, the King's Dog." And it came to pass that wherever the King was known, Luarth, the dog, was known also.

In those days there was a drouth in the King's land and because of the drouth the harvest failed; and because the grain had not grown, bread was scarce in the land; and because there was little bread, the King's people were troubled and ill content.

And as the way is when there is discontent and misery, they began to look about to find some one on whom to cast the blame for their plight.

"The King hath power over all," said some, "why should he let his people hunger? The King is to blame."

"Yes, the King is to blame," said the King's ene-

mies who were not slow to seize the opportunity to stir up strife.

Nor was it long before the whole land was filled with the cry: "Rid us of this King who gives no bread;" and angry men went to the King's palace to reckon with him.

The palace doors were broken down and the halls of the King's house filled with the mob, raging and roaring among themselves, and crying out for the King that they might wreak their wrath upon him. They hurried from room to room, tearing down the tapestries, breaking the King's treasures, and having their will in all things, for the King and his men had fled for their lives, and there was none to stand against the foes.

But when they had come to the council-chamber, what should they see seated upon the throne in the King's own place but Luarth, the dog!

And the sight tickled the fancy of the crowd.

"Hail! King Dog, hail!" cried one among them, and his fellows took up the cry.

"Hail, King Dog! Hail!" And they doffed their caps to the King's dog.

Now among the King's enemies there were two who were stronger and greater than the rest. Both were smooth of speech and cunning of wit, and bold of deed; and both desired above all other things to reign in the King's stead.

Therefore when the King's dog sat upon the throne, and the people cried "Hail, King Dog," the one

whom we will call Sir Wily-Way spoke out and said: "'Tis a wise jest. A dog may be as good a king as any." And he threw up his cap and cried, "Long live King Dog;" for he thought to himself, "If the rioters are humored they will go to their homes satisfied; and then it will be an easy matter to lay hold upon the throne."

"Aye, aye, let us make the dog king. Long live King Dog!" said the people; and they would have laughed and gone their ways as the wily knight had planned if it had not been for him whom we will call Sir Crafty-Heart.

"Not so fast," said he. "A dog may be as good a king as any, but he must have a counsellor. Never a king without a counsellor. 'Tis the law of the land."

"Good word. King Dog must have a counsellor," cried the crowd.

"Nay, two," said Wily-Way. "Safety's in two; and if one counsellor be wise, it goes beyond a doubt that two will be wiser."

"Aye, two counsellors," echoed the people; and the upshot of it all was that Sir Wily-Way and Sir Crafty-Heart were made king's counsellors, and the crowd, having shouted until they were hoarse, went home and to bed without more ado.

Then Sir Wily-Way gathered his henchmen together in one corner of the palace and plotted and planned how he might seize the throne; and Sir Crafty-Heart and those who followed him gathered in another corner and planned and plotted how he might

wear the crown. But the well-wishers of the one were as strong as and no stronger than the well-wishers of the other, and because of this, each bided his time. And King Dog reigned in the land.

Every day King Dog sat upon the throne in the council-room with a counsellor on either side; and every day those who had been wronged and those who had wronged them, came before him. And the council-chamber was filled with people to hear the King's judgments.

Sir Crafty-Heart and Sir Wily-Way were the King's spokesmen, and many a one sought their favor. When Master Thief had robbed a widow of her sheep he slipped gold in the counsellors' hands that he might go scot free though twenty witnesses were there against him.

"An innocent fellow, say I," quoth Wily-Way.

"Maligned by evil folk," said Crafty-Heart; but King Dog springing from the throne set hard upon the thief and, ere he could be freed, the clothes were torn from off his back.

"A judgment! A judgment!" shouted the crowd; and the counsellors trembling lest their own guilt should be discovered made haste to hale the fellow off to prison.

And when Goody Gammon, who had been a pensioner of the old King, was condemned as a witch by the counsellors, what should King Dog do but come down from his throne to lick her trembling hand and rub his head against her skirt!

"A sign! A sign!" cried the lookers-on; and, willy-nilly, Crafty-Heart and Wily-Way were forced to yield.

Yet in spite of King Dog, evil began to grow in the land. The strong oppressed the weak, and justice was often sold and bought, and the people began to groan under the burden of taxes which the false counsellors imposed.

"'Tis all the fault of Crafty-Heart," said Wily-Way. "Were I the ruler none would have complaint." And deeming that the time was ripe, he and his conspirators agreed that on a certain day, Sir Wily-Way should don the King's robes and his crown, and await the people in the council-room.

"Let them but see thee thus and they will be content," said the conspirators.

The King's robes were of purple, woven of finest wool, and his crown of gold was richly set with gems.

Sir Wily-Way was nothing loath to don such splendor.

"Had they been made for me they could not fit me better," he whispered as he stole through the palace halls to the council-chamber.

But he had not crossed the threshold when Luarth, the dog, who had come behind him unawares, sprang upon him and, seizing the purple robe between his teeth, held this false king back till Crafty-Heart and all his men came running fast.

"I was but bearing the royal robe and crown to

place upon the throne for greater honor of our King, the Dog," said Wily-Way as smooth as silk.

And because neither the one counsellor nor the other was certain of the people's favor, the matter passed; though Crafty-Heart was not deceived.

"Long live King Dog!" quoth he, and he would have patted the dog upon the head, but Luarth would have none of his caresses.

The dog reigned, and the counsellors plotted, and trouble grew apace in the land.

"'Tis Wily-Way who is to blame," said Crafty-Heart to all who made complaint. "He would even usurp the throne and set his heel upon your necks. But were I king all would be well."

And he laid plans that on a certain night he would open the palace doors to those who would make short work of Wily-Way and dog alike.

On the given night the false-hearted counsellor stole through the palace in his stocking feet. He would not even take a rush light in his hand, lest it betray him, but trusting to the glimmer of the moon to show the way, he slipped toward his goal.

Yet quiet and cautious as the counsellor was, King Dog heard his step and sounded an alarm. The highest tower and the deepest dungeon in the palace rang with his barking. Nor would he let Sir Crafty-Heart pass on till Wily-Way and all the palace servants ran in haste to see what caused the stir.

Crafty-Heart was hard put to it to explain why he should wander in his stocking feet at such late hour.

"I heard a tapping at the gate," said he, "and 'twas so loud it waked our gracious King, the Dog, as well."

Wily-Way was not deceived. He knew what Crafty-Heart was fain to do. But because he was not sure of his own strength, he let the matter rest. And King Dog reigned as before.

Taxes grew heavier and wrongs grew greater in the land; and a murmur rose among the folk:

"The old king was the best king," said they. "In his day the poor were heard. Would that he were here again!"

And it so happened that when the murmur was loudest, King Dog and the evil counsellors came from the palace to ride in the royal carriage through the city streets.

As the custom was, a throng of people stood at the palace gate to watch them go, and among the throng was a gray palmer with a cowl about his face.

"An alms to thee," said Sir Wily-Way, for he had learned that a free hand makes for favor with the crowd; and he was about to bestow a coin upon the holy man, when with a joyful bark, King Dog dashed by and leaped upon the palmer's breast, to kiss his face. As the dog made this loving onset, the palmer's hood fell back; and who should stand revealed before the wondering throng but the King's self!

"The King! The King! The King is here! Long live the King!" cried those who saw, and the cry grew apace from mouth to mouth. The city was filled with

the shout. "The King! The King! Long live the King!"

The evil counsellors hastened away at the sound of it. Whither they went and how, no man took heed nor cared. And there's an end to them.

But as for the King's dog, he walked by the King's side, and slept at his door and stood beside his throne all the days of his life; and the love between the two was as the love between friends.

Second Night

CHRISTMAS GREENS

The Hall was decked for holiday
With green of ivy, pine, and bay,
With forest firs that fragrance shed,
And holly, gay with berries red.
On either side of chimney, stood
Tall shapely cedars from the wood;
Green arches made the doorways fair
While garlands graced the stately stair.

Pillar and post were twined with green,
Festoons along the wall were seen.
Enwreathed were all the massive frames
Whence the ancestral men and dames
Looked down, as if with merriment, —
Such festive air the holly lent.
And one and all seemed fain to say
"Good folk, 'tis Christmas! Laugh! Be gay!"

One portrait was there of a maid
Whereon each passing glance was stayed.
It showed a fair, patrician face,
Too proud, were't not that one could trace,
In those deep eyes of shadowed blue
A steadfast nature, loving, true.
Her braids of bright brown hair were set
Above her brow like coronet;
Nay, like the crown a dryad weaves
Of Autumn's sun-gilt russet leaves.

If face and bearing ever show
High birth, then easy 'twas to know
This was no rustic, but a maid
Of rank. Then why was she arrayed
In tattered cloak, that hid her dress
But not her regal loveliness?
Some tale was hinted here. Who knew
This tale? Around the question flew
Until my Lady gently spoke;
"Come, Cousin, tell these wondering folk
About the Maid whose filial heart
Led her to play such gallant part,
In ransoming her honored sire,
And why this beggarly attire."

The Cousin scarcely waited till
The boon was asked, to say "I will.
The tale is loved by all our line
And is such favorite of mine,
That I have sought out circumstance
And incident, that might, perchance,
Like bright threads lend some gayety
To sober woof of history.
Hear then the tale of how this Maid
Her courage, wit, and love displayed."

LORD BERTRAM'S RANSOM

When word came that Lord Bertram was taken in battle and held for a great ransom, there was sorrow among his people, and dismay.

"The rents of twenty years would not pay such a ransom," cried the white-faced steward; "and who can help us?"

My lord's kindred were too poor; and hard to reach besides. The King? He was beset by debts at home and enemies abroad.

"And worst of all," said the rustic folk, "Lord Bertram hath no son to win him free—only a daughter. Alas, poor knight, there is no help for him!"

But those who reckoned thus reckoned without the daughter. It is true that when she had counted and recounted all the gold the castle coffer held, and found it far below the need, she wrung her hands and wept as troubled maids are wont to do. That night she sat beside her turret window looking down with tearful eyes upon the churchyard where her mother lay, and upon the hills and valleys that her father loved.

"Would I were son to fight for him," she cried.

All night she sat there weak and helpless, but in the morning she rose up strong and purposeful.

"Those who may not fight may work," said she; and she sent out messengers, not to men, gentle or simple, but to humble women.

"Spin, spin," said the messengers. "Spare not time nor strength nor pains, but spin, spin, for it is the spindles of his land that shall pay the ransom of our lord."

And thereafter no lassie went to gossip with another but she took her distaff underneath her arm and her spindle in her hand. The grandam in the chimney corner and the goose-girl in the field did each her stint of thread, and the shepherdess span as she watched her flock.

And when one loutish lad made bold to say it would be long ere his lord came home if it depended on women's spindles, my lord's daughter bade her henchman tie him up and lash faith in him. 'Tis true that ere the first stroke fell she changed her mind.

"Faith comes not at a lash's end," she said, as sternly as though other than herself had meted out the punishment.

But what the lash could not do, mercy did; leastwise, whether the lad had faith in women's work or not, from that time on he had faith in the daughter of his lord and was ever at her heels to fetch and carry for her.

The maid was here, there and everywhere, taking her turn at the work, counting the skeins of thread, or starting a song among the spinners.

Yet when night came and the house was still, she would look from her turret window with tearful eyes. The spinning of the flax was but the beginning of the task. It was night for my lord and night for his peo-

ple and black night for his daughter, till the homespun thread brought in the ransom gold.

With my lord at home and the land at peace, the selling of the thread had been an easy matter; but in these evil days there were robbers in the market places as surely as on the highway; robbers who outwitted the simple and cozened and beguiled the honest till to make a fair trade was as hard as to take a city. 'Twould need a steady head and a quick wit to drive a bargain with such folk as these and win the ransom money for my lord!

And whom should my lord's daughter send to do her bargaining? The steward was sick, the henchman but a dullard, and the strong men off to war. In the village were left only old men, and women and lads.

All one night the maid sat pondering, with her white face in her hands. "If I were son instead of daughter, none would dare to cheat me," she cried out in her despair. But when the morning came she rose up strong and purposeful. "Oaten cake is not as good as wheaten bread, yet a man may live by it," said she; and she bade her steward send the village lads to her, one by one.

To each lad she told a tale and put a question. "In my lord's barn there are two cats—one a great cat, yellow with white spots, and eyes of green, and the other, a wee gray thing, soft as the ermine on a king's coat. Wilt thou make for me in the barn door two holes, one large and the other small, that my cats may go out and in at will?"

The first lad made answer: "Aye, my lady!" And the second and the third answered as the first.

The fourth who came before the maid was none other than the loutish lad whom she had spared from the lash. And she said to him as she had said to the others:

"In my lord's barn there are two cats—one a great cat, yellow of coat and green of eyes; and the other a wee gray thing, soft as the ermine kings may wear. Wilt thou make for me in the barn door two holes, one large and the other small, that my cats may go out and in at will?"

"Nay," cried the lad like the unmannerly lout that he was. "If the little cat will not go through the great hole, let her stay in the barn, say I."

My lord's daughter took less notice of his manners than of his wits, but she was fain to test him again.

So on the morrow's morn she sent for the lads once more and gave them each a penny.

"Haste to the fair," said she, "and spend as ye will; but when the sun goes down come and tell me how the day went, and what the penny bought." And the lads were nothing loth to be off at her bidding.

All day my lord's daughter waited for them, and as the evening drew near, first one and then another came to give his reckoning.

One poor clown had lost his penny; one had bought a slab of gingerbread to stay his hunger; and another had a tinsel gaud to show.

They had told their tales and gone their way, when the lout of a lad came home.

"Well," said the maid, "was the day good and didst thou spend the penny?"

"Aye," said the lad, "I had not gone a stone's throw when I met a fellow with a pole across his shoulder—a fine pole, the like of which for fishing was never seen. I bought it from him with my lady's penny and was off to the brookside quicker than I can tell ye."

"But I bade thee go to the fair," said my lord's daughter.

"Aye, and to the fair I soon went with three fish on a string. Never saw ye such fish, my lady. Hardly had I come to the fair than a man cast eyes upon them. 'Lad,' said he, 'what take ye for the fish?' 'Three pennies,' said I. 'A penny ye mean,' said he. 'Three pennies,' said I. 'Two pence,' said he. 'Three,' said I, and I was for leaving him alone with his tight fists when he pulled out three pennies and took the fish without more ado.

"'Hey! marry come up!' said I, 'I shall be rich before I die.' And I put two pennies in my pocket but the third I held in my hand.

"No sooner had I held it there than it began to burn. 'What! art burning to be spent?' said I, and I looked about me to see where a rich man might lay out an honest penny.

"There was many a thing to be bought at the fair, my lady, and when the news got abroad that a lad with

a penny to spend was at hand, eh! but the sellers beset me.

"'Tis a fine riband to wear on thy hat come a Sunday that a gallant lad like thyself needs. All the lassies will be smiling at thee. Come, put down thy penny and choose a riband,' cried one.

"'Buy a bun—a sweet brown bun!' called a pasty cook.

"'Nay, but a little physic is better for thy health's sake,' quoth an apothecary, plucking at my sleeve. 'Art well to-day? Aye, but thou may'st be sick tomorrow,' and he was even after thrusting the powders upon me and possessing the penny.

"'Shame,' said the pasty cook, 'to talk of physic to a sturdy rogue like this. With a full stomach he could fell a giant. Buy a bun, lad, buy a bun.'

"But I was of a mind to choose for myself, and I stood my ground against them all. And while I was standing, who should come up but a piper! A grand man he was, my lady, with no breeches, but a skirt of plaid, red and blue, and a bonnet trimmed with a brooch as large as a goose egg.

"'Eh,' thought I to myself, looking at the size of him, 'he'll have breath and to spare to blow his pipe,' and I was fair beside myself to hear him blow.

"'Never fast, lad, when ye can feast. Buy a bun,' cried the cook, but I turned my back upon him.

"'A bun fills the stomach but a merry tune puts heart in a man,' said I. And I told the piper to play up.

"'Aye, but who will pay?' asked he, for he was a cautious man.

"'Have no fear,' said I; and I showed him the color of my money.

"Never heard ye a tune like the one he gave me. He was not well into it before I began to feel as great as the steward on a rent day. My very feet were filled with music till I could not keep them on the ground. And there I might be still, hearkening and dancing, if I had not spied the sun going down.

"'Have done,' I cried, 'and let me be gone, for to dance too long is as ill,' said I, 'as never to dance.'

"And when I had paid the piper, I lost no time but hastened away with a penny saved and a penny made against the day of my lord's ransoming."

And what should the lad do but put the two pennies down before my lord's daughter!

If the maid were pleased or ill-pleased, she said not a word, but she let the pennies lie; and that night she slept from dark to dawn. And all her dreams were of the home-coming of my lord.

On the next day she bade the lad take thread to market and bring back fair price for it or know the reason why. And the lad went and came that day, and many another day, driving good bargains with the buyers and bringing good account of all he did.

The wallet that held the ransom money began to grow heavy; and at last there came a day when what with the gold from the castle coffer and the maid's jewels and the coin the wool had brought, the price

of the ransom lay in a glittering heap on the great table in my lord's hall. My lord's daughter sat and looked at it, but her eyes were grave. The flax was spun, the thread was sold and the ransom ready; but who could take it to my lord? If she could get it to the King where he would hold court upon the morrow, she had good faith that he would speed the ransom on. But the road to the King's court was rough and perilous. To travel it with pence in your pocket invited robbery; and with this ransom, who would dare to go? Were it not best to wait till spring when my lord's kinsmen might be reached or when King's men might ride that way?

All night long my lord's daughter sat by the table, with her face upon her hands, thinking, and planning, or crying out:

"Were I a son there would be no delay!"

But at the first faint streak of dawn she rose up strong and purposeful. "What a son might do, a daughter can try," said she. "I will myself adventure to the King's court;" and snatching what disguise she might—a sleeping kitchen-wench's gown, a turnspit's shoes left by the hearth, a tattered cloak the scullery maid had dropped upon the stair—she dressed herself in haste.

The cock had not yet crowed for morning, when fetching the ransom with her—though it was burden all too heavy for her strength—she made her way to my lord's stable. She had thought to go unseen, but whom should she spy at the stable door but the lout

of a lad, stretching and yawning, it is true, but wide enough awake to know the maid in spite of her strange garb, and to guess her purpose.

Whether my lord's daughter was vexed or glad to see him, she said naught of it, but bade him make himself of use straightway.

The lad worked sturdily without a word. Even though the lady chose the sorriest nag the stable held to ride upon, he asked no questions. But when at last the ransom was safe hidden in a truss of hay, and the hay on the nag's back, and my lord's daughter mounted there like any peasant lass, the lout cried hardily:

"If ye take me not with ye, I will follow after."

My lord's daughter was half a mind to treat his boldness with a switch.

"If we win free of this adventure 'twill be a pity if I cannot find a cure for such sauciness as thine," she cried.

But the lad having met her mercy once, thought less of what she threatened than that she did not bid him stay behind; and taking with him for his weapon a good staff of oak, he walked beside the horse's head.

From morn till noon my lord's daughter and the lout of a lad journeyed thus, stopping only to give the nag a breathing-space, or to quench their thirst by a brookside, or to eat a crust beneath a greenwood tree. And of hindrance they had none.

But at the turn of the day, and as it happened at

the road's turn, too, they encountered a blustering rogue who cried, "Stand and deliver!"

"Not till my lad's good stick hath made acquaintance with thy back," called the maid. And the lad nothing loth to do such task, fetched the knave a most tremendous whack, and one again, and still another till the rogue was fain to let his feet save his skin, and so ran bellowing away like the poor craven fellow that he was at heart.

The lad was well-nigh beside himself with pride.

"That's the way to rid ourselves of thieves," said he, flourishing his stick above his head.

"Aye, some thieves," said my lord's daughter, and she bade the lad lead on, and save his boasting till the journey's end.

The lad was silenced, but his grasp was none the less secure upon his doughty stick for all my lady's talk. And when, as fortune had it, another thief beset their path demanding toll in no uncertain terms, the lad was quick to cry, "Not till my stick hath made acquaintance with thy back."

But the keen-eyed maid, perceiving that he was no match for this rogue, began to plead:

"Nay, nay, no blows. Good sir, I pray ye heed him not. 'Tis but a lad;" and crying, "If we must, we must," she drew from out her pocket a rough purse in which a sixpence lay and bade the robber take it if he had the heart.

And all the while, her face downcast and hidden by her hood, she played her part of rustic lass so well that

Master Thief believed her what she seemed and let her go; although he grumbled at the pence, and more at war which kept the rich folk from the road.

This time the loutish lad had not a word to say but plodded sturdily along, scratching his head in wonder at his lady's ways.

Now it would seem that these two had had enough of peril, yet scarcely had they left the hardy thief behind than the road brought them to an awesome wood. Low-hung branches shut them in, birds with heavy wings brushed by them; and as they went fearfully through this gloomy place they came upon two gay-clad men of evil countenance, who barred their path.

At very sight of them the lad's heart leaped to his throat, but ere he could so much as falter, he heard the maid's voice speaking clearly:

"Tell me again, good lad, about the Lord of Bertram's ransom. Didst see the gold thyself?"

The words were scarcely spoken when the two knaves were at her side.

"What gold?" they cried. "And where?"

"My Lord of Bertram's ransom," said the maid. "Heard ye no talk of it? The like was never known. Silver and gold and jewels! Was it not jewels?" she asked the lad.

"Aye, jewels," said the lad, "and gold and silver."

"A messenger's to take it to the King," said my lord's daughter. "Heard ye not so, dear lad?"

"Aye, I heard that," said the lad stolidly.

"And by this road?" the knaves inquired.

"If this road leads to where the King keeps court."

"To-day?"

"Aye, ere the King be gone."

"My lord's daughter will not wait till spring, though spring were better time," said the maid.

But the robbers paid little heed to this. Already their eyes were fastened upon the road and their ears strained to hear each sound. And when my lord's daughter and the lad made as if to look and listen with them, the knaves bade them go on their way.

"And hark ye," said one, "tell not your tale again. 'Tis ill to speak of gold in such a wood where thieves might lurk. But *we* shall take good care of messenger and ransom, too."

My lord's daughter and the lout of a lad needed no second bidding to be off; and as they went they laughed, though softly lest the robbers hear.

Beyond the wood the King's highway stretched broad and white and there was no more hindrance to their journey. Yet in spite of this, and of their haste, it was late when they came to the King's lodging and asked for audience; and the King's men seeing the sorry nag and the lout of a lad, and the maid's poor garb, doubted her rank and so were fain to forbid her entrance to the King.

But my lord's daughter was a great lady and not to be denied.

"Way," she cried, "Way for a Bertram to the King!" And with her head held high above her tattered cloak, she rode unchallenged through the gates.

That she gained the King's ear and that the King made haste to send the ransom on its way, there is no doubt; for the Christmas goose was not yet upon the spit when Lord Bertram came home.

There was merry-making in the huts of the spinners and joy in the castle hall that day; and of all who sang and danced and laughed, none was so glad, I ween, as my lord's daughter, nor so proud of himself as the lout of a lad.

UNDER THE MISTLETOE

All praised the festive greenery
But youthful eyes, though bashfully,
Roved round the Hall, unsatisfied
Until the mistletoe they spied.
Like pearls did its white berries gleam
Where high it hung from central beam.
(Take warning, maids! The lads well know
Their rights, beneath the mistletoe.)

The first to fall into the trap
Was Nurse, whose awe-inspiring cap
And pompous air, had kept her free
But for her well-known jollity.
And though she cried, "Hold, knave,
enough!"
And gave her captor's ears a cuff,
Not less his laughter for the blow.
All's sport beneath the mistletoe.

The Squire no chance would ever miss
To give his Lady dear a kiss.
So grasped at dame he thought was she,
And smacked her lips right lovingly,
To find he'd kissed the Aunt instead,
O tricksy dusk that thus misled!

The Eton Boy, with well-laid plot
Brought slyly to the dangerous spot,
The Younger Sister, and with glee
Exacted the sweet penalty.
The Justice by his dimpled lass
Was seen (unheeding man!) to pass
'Neath where the mistletoe was hung.
Her arms were quickly round him flung
And, in great triumph at her catch,
A dozen kisses she must snatch.

The Little Son by hovering nigh
The mistletoe with watchful eye,
Each damsel soon or late waylaid
Except that fairy-footed maid
The Older Sister. Never she
Went 'neath the bough unwarily.
And howe'er skilfully pursued
Did easily each lad elude;
Outwitted every new device
Yet would to further chase entice.

So it was solemnly decreed
That since to custom old, good heed
She had not paid, escaping so
Pursuers 'neath the mistletoe,
She tale or ballad must recite,
Elsewise, submit to the old rite.
"*Merci!*" she cried. "An easy choice!"
And told with laughter in her voice:

THE TAILOR'S QUESTION

ONCE upon a time a King looked from his window at evening and seeing a rainbow in the sky, he said:

"There will be rain to-morrow."

"Nay, nay, Your Majesty," cried all his counsellors. "A rainbow at morning is the shepherd's warning, but a rainbow at night betokens fair skies."

Yet, as fortune would have it, their sign failed, and they waked next morn to hear rain on the roof.

The King was mightily pleased with himself and his wisdom. Nor was it long before he began to think that if he knew more than his counsellors about one thing, he was likely to know more about other matters also.

"And if I know more than they, why have counsellors?" he asked. And in spite of all they could say or do, he sent them packing off with their law books and seals and keys and quills. There was not even so much as an ink-horn left behind them.

"A good riddance," said the King. "Now I shall set my kingdom to rights;" and having none to say "Nay, Your Majesty," or "Yea, Your Majesty," he soon had everything by the ears.

He told the royal cook how many plums to put in the pudding; and the court barber how many hairs would make a wig.

He bade the clock-makers have their clocks say something other than "Tick-tock," and he ordered old and young alike to bed when the sun went down. The business of the candlestick-maker was entirely ruined!

Every day the King issued new decrees changing this and changing that, till it was no wonder that there were troubled hearts and long faces in his kingdom or that men went about, telling of their trials.

Each one had a grievance of his own:

"He hath changed wash-day," cried the washer-women.

"We must count our every stitch," said the tapestry-workers.

"He is taking Christmas from the calendar," mourned the parson.

"Let us march in a body to the palace and demand our liberties again," said the blacksmith.

"Nay, let us send a writing," said the clerk who liked to have things set down in black and white.

And the clerk having the last word, a petition was drawn up in fair script to put the whole matter of the people and their rights before the King.

When the petition reached the palace, the King was teaching the royal bed-makers how to make beds and he was ill-pleased at the interruption. He was less pleased when he read what the people wished and the clerk had written.

"I will teach them how to interfere with me," he stormed. And he sent a herald out to shout his royal mandate at every corner.

"Hark ye! Hear ye!" the herald cried. "Thus sayeth our wise and gracious King! If any man among ye, rich or poor or high or low, can put a question forth to which the King hath no reply, or if the King make answer and the answer be not right, then shall the counsellors be called again and all things shall be as in days gone by.

"But hark ye! Hear ye! If any man, of high degree or low, or rich, or poor, shall put a question to the King to which the King maketh answer and that answer right, then shall the asker's head adorn the city's walls and on his body carrion crows shall feast. And from that day the King shall rule alone as now. Hark ye! Hear ye!"

At the King's cross and the church door, in the public square and the market place, the herald cried and the people heard. Nothing else was talked of anywhere but the King's proclamation; and at last the parson bade one and all assemble in the churchyard at a certain hour, that they might put their heads together concerning the question. And at the appointed time there was a great gathering, and much talking, though to little purpose.

Some professed good courage but had no question for the King; some had a question, but no courage; and some there were with neither courage nor question who passed judgment on all that others said.

"If I had question, I would ask it," cried an apprentice lad.

"Then here is one," said his fellow. "How many stars are in the sky? Nobody knows that."

"Then if the King maketh answer, who can say if he be right or wrong?" objected one who heard.

"Here is a question and an answer, too," spoke out a lass. "What traveler goes by day and night, yet never leaves his bed? A river."

"Nay, but if thou hast the answer, why not the King also?" cried a good dame.

And so it went till faces grew longer and hearts heavier, and what would have been done 'twere hard to tell had it not been for a little Tailor who had sat through all the talk listening and saying nothing. Nobody knew he was there till of a sudden he piped up:

"I will put a question to the King."

Serious though the matter was, none could keep from laughing at the little Tailor's offer; and a wag among the crowd sang out:

> "There was a doughty Tailor,
> No bigger than a flea;
> Though all the world should quail and fail,
> 'I'm not afraid,' quoth he."

But the little Tailor was not to be abashed by jests nor teasing; and what his question was he would not tell though the parson himself asked.

The very next day he went to the King's palace and mounted the steps as bold as you please.

"Hey, minnikin, manikin, who comes here?" asked

the King's warders; and when they heard who he was and what his errand was, they laughed no less than the townspeople had done.

"Have a care for thy head, little man," they cried, but the Tailor would not listen to them. Question the King he would though he died for it; and seeing there was no other way to satisfy him, the warders brought him to the King.

The King was as cross as a King could be that morn, and no wonder, for his new velvet doublet set awry and what the trouble was he could not tell, for all he was so wise.

He was just about to abolish the making of doublets in his land, when looking up he spied the little Tailor at his throne. And it would have gone hard with the Tailor had he not spoken speedily and to the purpose.

"I have come to ask the question, if it please Your Majesty," he cried; and ask it he did without delay. "What am I thinking of?" said he.

"That I will have no answer for thy silly question, clown," thundered the King; and the very look in his face made the warders tremble.

But the little Tailor was not afraid.

"Nay, nay, Your Majesty," said he. "I was but thinking that Your Majesty's fine doublet doth set awry because it hath more eyelets for its lacing on the one side than it hath upon the other."

There was just one thing for the King to do then, —to keep his promise,—and he did it royally. The

counsellors were called back and all things were as in days gone by.

Aye, and the little Tailor was made Court Tailor in the bargain.

Third Night

THE VILLAGE FIDDLER

Now came one, bidden by the Squire,
The Fiddler, known through all the shire
For witchery with bow and string
And songs that he could make and sing.
The music magic of the birds
Was in his hand and voice and words.

When o'er the fiddle-strings his bow
A-dancing went, then forth did flow
Such merry music "as might make
A stone man's toes to life awake,"
Declared the Squire, whose sturdy feet
The music lifted light and fleet.

Who could resist the charm? Not one.
The rippling joy in every tone
The fiddle gave, had its own way
With all the guests, and made them gay,
Ready to seize the happy chance
To frolic in a country-dance.

Next did the Fiddler's skilful hand
A tune of stately rhythm command,
A minuet. "Ah!" said the Squire,
"Now hast thou hit on my desire.
A minuet's the proper dance,

Allowing grace and elegance."
For partner he looked o'er the crowd,
Low to the Older Sister bowed;
And other Guests, in couples met,
Danced the slow-measured minuet.

The Fiddler's bow leaped once again
To touch the strings; and livelier strain
Broke forth, and faster, merrier grew.
Was it a dance? a song? None knew
Until the Fiddler's voice joined in
As jolly as his violin,
His song such instant favor won
That when the second verse was done
All sang the chorus with full zest,—
The big Squire booming out his best.

THE DANCE ON THE GREEN

Lads and lasses flock together,
  Light of foot and bright of eye;
All a-tiptoe for the dancing
  Tow'rd the village green they hie.

Chorus. Come to the dance, come Doris and Larry,
  Margery, Timothy, Phyllis, and Paul,
Under the moon come trip to the music,
  Merrily answer the gay fiddle's call.

Who is this in sky-blue trousers,
  Scarlet vest and shirt of snow?
Oh, my eye! 'Tis Bob the miller,
  Splendid as a London beau.
Chorus. Come to the dance, etc.

Blushing Nell has dropped her slipper,
  Dickon, with a roguish glance,
Brings it, begs a kiss in payment,
  Nay, she'll give him but a dance.
Chorus. Come to the dance, etc.

Limber Hal would show a caper,
  But alack for dancer proud!
Up his heels go, down he tumbles,
  While with laughter roars the crowd.
Chorus. Come to the dance, etc.

Yonder see that pair a-smiling,
  Each to t'other, man and maid.
Mark my words! Before a twelve-month
  Shall their wedding tune be played!

Chorus. Come to the dance, come Doris and Larry,
  Margery, Timothy, Phyllis, and Paul,
Under the moon come trip to the music,
  Merrily answer the gay fiddle's call.

CHRISTMAS SONGS

As one small light can many lights
Enkindle, so one song invites
More song. Thus was it at the Hall
The Fiddler's Song did quickly call
To mind this song and that to sing,
And buzz of eager questioning.
'Twas "Know you that?" and "Know you
this?"
"I'll hum the tune—Bah! there I miss."
And singing songs they loved and knew
To closer comradeship folk grew.

All sang,—from groom to Squire; for though
Some neither time nor tune did know
These used their lung-power to the full
And roared to rival Bashan's bull.
What matter? Some like larks outpoured
Notes clear and strong that skyward soared,—
Such conquering sweetness in the sound
That tunefulness all discord drowned.

Among these larks one Joyous Guest
The Younger Maid, outsang the rest.
When then the Company was fain
To draw breath ere they sang again,

She with a voice like magic flute
A Carol sang the time to suit.
Then rose a hymn in the Great Hall,
Chirped softly by the children small.

Came forward next a kitchen lad,
An awkward lout, but young and glad,
Who trolled forth like a troubadour:
"Fair Doris, fly from me no more."

"Hark ye! We'll now some catches try,"
The Squire called, with beaming eye.
He portioned out the Company,
Assigned the parts judiciously,
And the first catch himself did start,
Sustaining lustily his part:

Catches

I

Boar's head and wassail,
  Hail! I cry.
Feast, King and vassal,
  Feast will I.
Hail, fat Goose! and hail, Plum Pudding!
  Hail, Mince Pie!

II

Light the candles! Light the candles
  Joy! Joy! Joy! Joy!
God hath lit His Star above us,
O how greatly He doth love us!

III

Day's joyance hath an end.
Now may sweet peace descend.
Good-night! Good-night!

When the catch-singing stopped at last,
At the great clock were glances cast
And murmurs rose. "The hour's not late."
"And none are sleepy." "Why not wait
For one tale ere good-nights are said
And candles light us up to bed?"
"The Fiddler many a good tale knows.
Let him tell one before he goes."
The Elders gave indulgent ear
For "Christmas comes but once a year."

THE TINKER'S GIANT

THE Tinker of Wraye was never done with boasting. He would not be afraid, not he, if he should meet a lion in the road. And as for highwaymen—let one attack him. Alas, poor rogue, he'd ride his way no more!

Yet some folks started at a creaking hinge, or squeaking mouse. Bah, let them send for the Tinker!

If he had been at home the farmer's ram would never have had chance to frighten little Bess the sexton's child. For half a penny he would take that ram right by the horns,—though not this day, for he must go to mend Dame Durham's pans. And he was never late. If he had said he'd come upon a certain day, then come he would. The King's word was not surer than the Tinker's.

He had seen the King once on a time and he, the Tinker, was the taller man, and of a bigger bulk.

"It is true, I do assure you," said the Tinker. "The King is not so large of bulk as I. And I'm a better trencherman than he, I'll warrant ye. There's none eats heartier than I, and eating makes a body stout, aye, and strong, too. The wrestler at the fair who threw seven men hath not a stronger arm than mine."

If walking were the talk, then were the Tinker's legs the swiftest ever known. If any one slept well, the

Tinker had slept sounder. Saw ye a hare, the Tinker had seen two! Week in, week out, he boasted loud and long and might be boasting yet had it not been for the great-headed giant.

'Twas a Saturday night and late when the Tinker came upon the giant waiting in the lane, through which he needs must pass. What the giant's body was like, the Tinker could not tell, for it was a black night; but his great round head with fiery eyes and grinning mouth was all too plain to see.

As high above the Tinker's head as the church steeple is above the church, it glowered through the darkness. At sight of it the Tinker fell to shivering and shaking as if he had an ague on him.

He dared not go forward and he dared less to turn his back upon the fearsome thing; and to stand still was worst of all.

There was naught to do but to speak the giant fair, if only the Tinker could find the proper words to say.

"Good sir, your lordship, honored knight, most worshipful and gentle giant," said he; but the great-headed giant neither moved nor spoke.

"I wish you good even," cried the Tinker, "though 'tis a cold night for your grace—a cold night, a windy night, a dark night, an awesome night, a—Saturday night," said he, his teeth chattering as he spoke.

But the great-headed giant answered never a word.

"I am but a poor Tinker following my trade. Had ye a leaking pan I'd mend it for ye with the best," quavered the Tinker, backing off all the more.

For the life of him, he could not keep his eyes from the giant's monstrous head.

Saw ever man the like before! Such eyes, such nose, such mouth!

"I prithee let me pass," cried the Tinker; and, gathering up what courage he had left, he was about to try for home when through the giant's grinning mouth he spied a tongue of flame that wagged this way and that.

"Help, help!" cried the Tinker, and his very terror giving strength to his trembling legs, he sprang past the giant and sped toward home as fast as ever ran a hare.

As he ran thus in the dark he stumbled upon a man who was making strange gurgling sounds as though he were in pain—or full of mirth, perhaps.

The Tinker was for passing him without speaking, but he had not gone a step when the man hailed him. And who should it be but Hal, the miller's son.

"Oh, Hal! Oh, lad! Oh, Hal, good lad!" cried the Tinker. "Speak softly and let us haste away ere the giant come upon us."

"A giant!" quoth Hal. "In all my life I've seen no giant. Good Tinker, lead me to the sight."

"But this giant is a different kind from other giants," cried the Tinker. "His tongue is made of fire. I do declare I saw it shining through his mouth. Come, let us 'scape him while we may."

"Nay, nay," said Hal. "Thou'rt brave, and I am not afraid with thee. What say ye? Let us kill a

giant as did Welsh Jack. 'Twill be a famous deed."

"Wait, wait; let's first give warning to the town," said the Tinker, clinging to Hal's arm.

But the more he cried out, the more Hal persisted, till at last for very shame the Tinker went with him. And the two soon spied the giant waiting in the lane.

"Shall I strike first or thou?" asked Hal. "I am not weak, but thou art strong as seven, I know, for I have heard thee tell it half a hundred times. Speak up—wilt strike the blow?" quoth he.

"Nay, nay!" the Tinker cried. "Not I!"

"Then loose thy hold," said Hal, "and let me go." And shaking himself free from the Tinker, he dealt the giant such a blow that off fell his fiery head and rolled into the ditch.

"Ha!" cried the Tinker, "we have finished him." And he was for taking the giant's head into the town without delay.

"Nay, let it cool till morn," quoth Hal, as cool himself as ice; and bidding the Tinker hold his peace till he should give him leave to speak, he started home straightway.

But miller's son or no miller's son, the Tinker was up and boasting as soon as the town stirred next morn.

"Come ye," said he, "and see what I and miller's son have done. Welsh Jack hath never slain a greater giant than we. Ye never knew that there were giants now? Nor I, until I spied him in the lane. He was

no Christian, I assure you that, for flames came from his mouth, aye, and from nose and eyes."

A crowd collecting by this time, the Tinker led the way till they came to an old sign-post that had stood in the lane since the oldest man in the village was a child. And hanging on the post they spied a ragged coat that waved and flapped in every breeze.

"Why, 'tis the coat the farmer's scarecrow wore," cried one among the crowd. "How came it here?"

"And look ye in the ditch. What's this half-broken thing with eyes and nose and mouth?" another called.

"Oh! that's the pumpkin that I sold but yesterday to Hal, the miller's son,—the saucy wag!" said Farmer Brown. And he fell a-laughing.

"And here's a candle-end he begged from my good wife last night! The merry rogue!" said Goodman Grimes.

"But where's the giant's head? And what's the jest?" the Tinker cried, as one and then another of the crowd began to roar with mirth.

"Go ask the miller's son," said they, laughing the more.

But from that day to this the Tinker has not asked; and if what they tell be true, the people of Wraye hear no more of his boasting.

The Dance on the Green

EMILIE POULSSON — ELEANOR SMITH

Allegro giocoso

1. Lads and lass - es flock to - geth - er, Light of foot and bright of eye, All a - tip - toe for the danc - ing,
2. Who is this in sky - blue trou - sers, Scar - let vest and shirt of snow? Oh, my eye! 'tis Bob the mil - ler,
3. Blush - ing Nell has dropped her slip - per, Dick - on with a ro - guish glance Brings it, begs a kiss in pay - ment,

f

mf *mp*

Tow'rd the vil - lage green they hie. Come to the dance, come
Splen - did as a Lon - don beau. Come to the dance, come
Nay, she'll give him but a dance. Come to the dance, come

mf *mp*

mf *cres* - - - - -

Dor - is and Lar - ry, Mar - ge - ry, Tim - o - thy,

mf *cres* - - - - -

cen - *do.* *f*

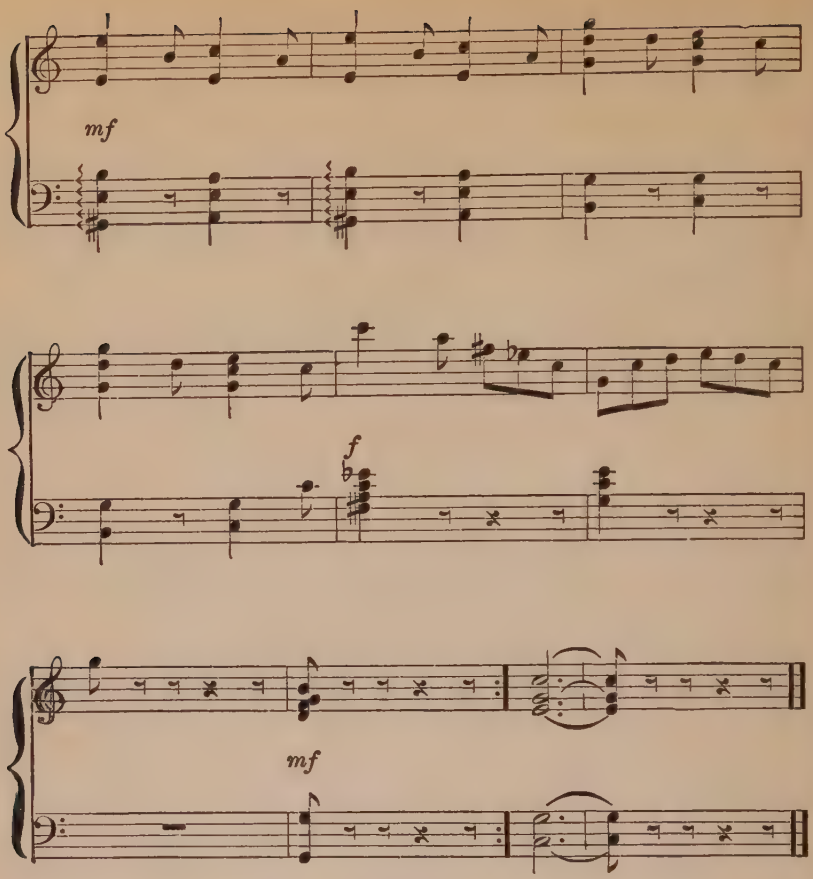
Phyl - lis and Paul, Un - der the moon, come trip to the mus - ic,

cen - *do.* *f*

f

Mer - ri - ly an - swer the gay fid - dle's call.

f

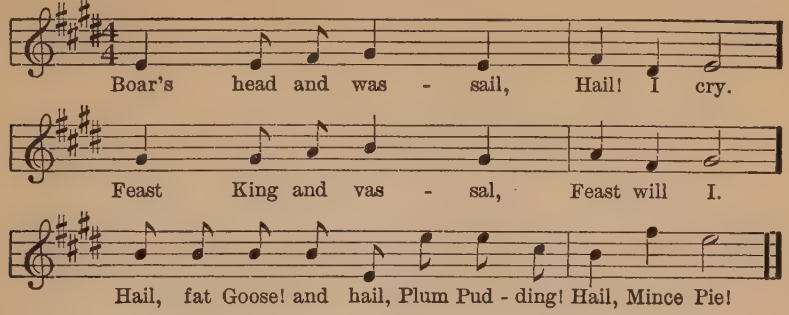


4 Limber Hal would show a caper,
But alack for dancer proud!
Up his heels go, down he tumbles,
While with laughter roars the crowd.
Come to the dance, etc.

5 Yonder see that pair a-smiling,
Each to t'other, man and maid.
Mark my word! Before a twelvemonth
Shall their wedding tune be played.
Come to the dance, etc.

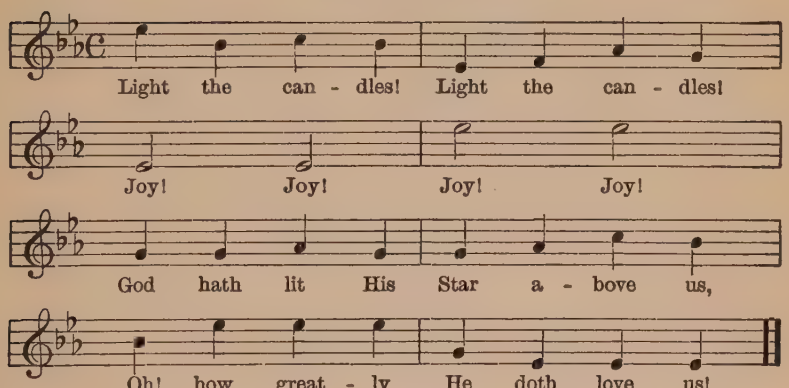
Boar's Head and Wassail

E. P. Round in three parts E. S.



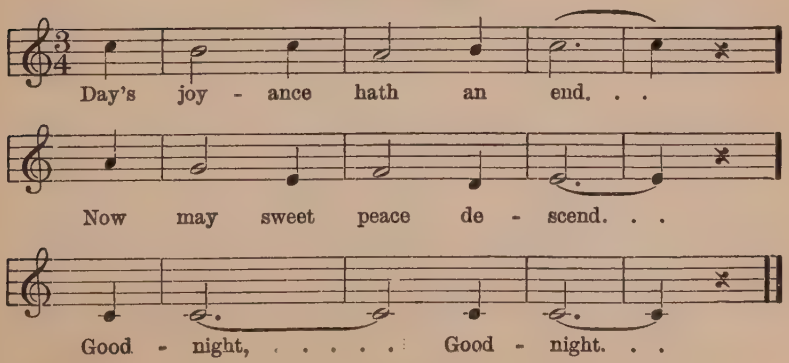
Light the Candles

E. P. Round in four parts E. S.



Day's Joyance Hath an End

E. P. Round in three parts E. S.



Fourth Night

THE ETON LAD

This lad was hero to the admiring crowd
Of younger children who were glad and proud
To flock around him; countless questions ask
About his great school world of sport and task,
And hear his countless tales of races run,
(They knew he had or could have won each one.)
Of cricket, archery, of hare and hounds,
Of floggings due, if one strayed out of bounds;
How he a-swimming went; how masters stern
Were ready with birch rods at every turn
To switch into one's brain the Latin, Greek,
Or other learning they might bid him seek.

His deeds were wondrous in the children's eyes,
Witty his lightest word or monstrous wise.
So, when their hero, in the ancient game
"Snapdragon," plucked from out the threatening flame
The lucky raisin, making him that night
Of sports the Master, boundless their delight.

With borrowed spectacles of horn in place,
And lordly look upon his roguish face,
He orders gave. First all the Company
In "Blindman's Buff" went romping merrily.

Then "Forfeits," and the mirth grew wilder yet,
Such odd, side-splitting penalties he set.
Not even Squire or Vicar could escape,
One must like lion roar, one play the ape.
Anon, still ordered by this tricksy wight
The Guests a-jigging go with all their might.

At last he bade them in a circle sit,
And use their tongues and show their nimble wit
In guessing riddles. He would give the first,
So full of them his brain, 'twas like to burst.
Then other riddles did the Guests propound
And riddles, guesses, answers flew around.

Riddles

I

I saw a host with a million blades,
A million blades or more,
Upon the hill and in the lane,
And at the cottage door.
"Alas!" I cried. "Against such host
Who will my good lands keep?"
But when I had thought twice, I sent
An army of my sheep.

(Grass.)

II

'Tis not to be bought for silver or gold,
The more you put in it, the more it will hold.

(The Mind.)

III

What king with crimson banners bright
Can eat a city in a night;
But who, though such a greedy sinner,
Will humbly cook a peasant's dinner?

(Fire.)

IV

What giant with lofty brow hath but one foot?

(A Mountain.)

V

What runs without feet?

(A Brook.)

VI

Neither lord nor lady I, but always bear a title;
Neither tree nor bough nor bush, but always have I leaves.
However much you take from me, I lose nothing.

(A Book.)

VII

Riddle ree, riddle right,
Stays at home, day and night.
Yet wanders far
To sun and star,
Follows bird on the wing
Or rests on cloud or creeping thing.

(The Eye.)

VIII

Although they live in the selfsame place,
One seldom sees the other's face.
When he's abroad, she hides away.
He goes—she comes in bright array.

(Sun and Moon.)

But ere the riddle-play began to pall
The Master of the Sports cried "Silence all!"
And turning to the Younger Sister said:
"I now to tell a tale command this maid."
She saw the glint of mischief in his eye,
But said demurely, "Master, I will try."

THE COW THAT CARRIED A QUEEN

There was once a maid who tended her mother's cow each day, watching it in the pasture, leading it to drink at the brookside, and driving it home through dewy lanes at evening.

Never was such faithful cowmaid! Pipe who would, or call who did, none could tempt her from her charge.

The cow that the maid watched was as black as a raven's wing except for one white hair, and that grew on her forehead.

"The elves have left their mark upon her," said the mother, and because of this fancy the cow was called Elfin.

Every morning and every night the cow gave milk as sweet and yellow as the cowslip that bloomed in the pasture lands. The butter that was churned from the milk was like gold, and brought a good price in the market. The maid and her mother lacked for naught as long as Elfin, the cow, let down her milk to them.

Now one day as the maid watched the cow in the pasture, she heard a goose-girl and a shepherdess and a swineherd talking together; and all their talk was of the King of the next country.

He was a new King, and what he might do or might not do there was no telling; but great things were expected of him. And everybody thought that he

would have tournaments and feasts and merry-makings in plenty, for he was young and full of happiness.

The swineherd had learned all this and much more, too, from his brother, a ploughboy, who had talked with a packman just come from a fair in the young King's country.

"There is no end to what the packman told," said the swineherd.

"And what is the King like?" asked the goose-girl.

"Well that," said the swineherd, "I did not hear; but I'll warrant ye he is like any man with eyes to see with, and ears to hear with, and legs to carry him about."

"But hath he wit in his head?" cried the shepherdess. "If he hath, he is not like to thee."

"The packman told my brother, the teamster, and my brother, the ploughboy, told me that there was no wiser king in Christendom than this one," said he.

"And what of the Queen? Is she as beautiful as the King is wise?" questioned the goose-girl.

"There is no queen, but the packman telleth of a prophecy about one," said the swineherd.

"A prophecy!" cried the goose-girl and the shepherdess. "And what doth it say?" they asked.

The swineherd could not for the life of him remember.

"'Tis old, though," said he, "older than anybody knoweth; and the packman sayeth that many a one looketh for its fulfillment in the young King's time. But others say it never hath come true and never will."

The swineherd's talk ran on like a babbling brook, but the maid could stay no longer to listen, for it was time to take the cow home.

"He will tell more to-morrow," she thought as she drove the cow into the road; and she had it in her mind that she would ask the King's name then. But what she did upon the morrow you shall hear!

The road that led home was as plain and straight as a road could be, and day after day the cow had followed it. But this day she had not gone a rod when she broke away from the maid and went through flowers and weeds across a hill where no road was.

She would not turn nor stop for all the maid could do or say.

"The sun is low and the mother waits with the milking-pail. Come, Elfin, come," cried the maid; and she ran this way and that way, coaxing and calling, and even striking the cow with a willow switch that she broke from a bush.

But Elfin-cow only swished her tail across her back and plodded steadily along as if she knew right well whither she would fare and how to go.

And the maid went close at her heels. Not once did she lose the cow from sight, for, thought she:

"If I leave her, she may fall into a pit, or wander into woods where the wolves live, or, escaping them, a thief may take her."

Through bush and bramble and burdock and brake they went, till they came to a green glen where never

mortal maid had been before, though this the cowmaid did not know.

The turf of the glen was as soft and thick and green as moss in the deep forest, and upon it grew a thousand flowers, some white and star-shaped, some with tiny bells, and some with silvery cups to hold the dew.

The black cow knelt among them to rest, chewing her cud and blinking her eyes as contented as if she were at home. And the maid, nibbling a crust left from her midday meal, and thinking of her mother, sat down at Elfin's side.

She had not sat there long when her eyelids grew heavy and her head began to nod. The sun had scarce gone down and the moon had not come up, when she was fast asleep. And the cow's back was her pillow.

As she slept she dreamed that all the fairy folk came flocking to the glen. Trip-tip, their feet were as light as the breeze upon the grass, and their faces were flower-fair.

And the maid dreamed that strange talk passed between the cow and them.

"Will she go to the journey's end?" asked the fairies.

"Aye," answered Elfin, "she will go where I go, though it be to the world's end."

"Then there is no time to lose," cried the fairies, dancing and whirling and twirling through the glen as if they had gone joy-mad.

"Who will make the crown?" asked the cow, though what crown or whose crown she did not say.

"The elves will make the crown and the wedding slippers, and we must take the measures," said the fairies; and fetching a grass blade they measured the maid's foot; and they wound a vine about her head.

"Oh!" said she laughing, for a leaf of the vine tickled her forehead, and she awoke quickly.

Elfin-cow was awake, too,—swish went her tail across her back. The moon was bright and the flowers stirred as a breeze went by. But of fairy folk there was no sign.

As the maid rubbed her eyes and stared about her, the cow bestirred herself to journey. Neither petting nor coaxing nor scolding could make her lie down on the turf again. Travel she would and the maid must follow.

By hollow and holt and heath they went till they came to a wood where never mortal maid had been before, though this the cowmaid did not know.

Oak-tree and ash-tree, hazel-tree and silver-birch glimmered in the moonlight; and beneath them grew a thousand ferns, some with plumy fronds, some like straight green lances, and some as delicate as lace.

The cow lay down among them as contented as if she were at home, and the maid sat beside her, wondering when and where this strange adventure would end.

As she sat there her head began to droop and her eyes to close. The moon had not reached its greatest height when she was fast asleep with the cow's back for her pillow.

No sooner was she asleep than she dreamed that a shoemaker elf sat beneath a hazel-tree working as busily as if everything in the world depended on his hammer's tap.

"Ho, Elfin-cow," he called. "The slippers will be ready in a blink of thine eye and a swish of thy tail."

The maid was curious enough to know whose slippers these might be, but before she could ask the question, the cow blinked an eye, and swished her tail across her back.

"Finished! Finished!" called the elf, throwing his cap into the air and twirling on his tiny toes as if he had gone joy-mad.

The cap fell upon the maid's face and the feather that was in it tickled her nose.

"Oh," said she laughing, and she awoke straightway.

Elfin-cow was awake,—swish went her tail across her back. The ferns stirred in the passing breeze, and a woodpecker tapped on a tree near by. But of the shoemaker elf there was no sign.

The maid sat puzzling as to what these dreams might mean, but the cow bestirred herself to journey. Neither gentle word nor cross word could make her lie among the ferns again. Travel she would and the maid must follow.

Through dingle and dale, by fen and fell they went, till they came to a hill where never mortal maid had been before, though this the cowmaid did not know.

Neither tree nor bush nor fern nor flower grew upon the hill. The grass was scant and dry between the

lichen-covered rocks, and on the field at the hill's foot, a thousand stones gleamed white and cold in the waning moonlight.

The cow lay down among the stones as contented as if she were at home and the maid sat beside her though it seemed a weird and lonely place in which to rest.

Yet she could not keep awake. No sooner had she sat down than drowsiness overcame her. The moon had not finished its course in the sky when she was fast asleep.

As she slept, she dreamed that little men with wrinkled faces and long beards came trooping from the hill. Their legs were no larger than barley straws and their eyes twinkled and laughed beneath their bushy eyebrows.

And the maid dreamed that they knew Elfin and that the cow knew them.

"The cock crows and night goes," cried Elfin warningly as they came.

"Aye, but the work is done," said the little men, and stamping on the stones as if they had gone joy-mad, they lifted up a golden circlet, dazzling bright.

"Oh!" said the maid laughing, for the splendor of it hurt her eyes. And she awoke to find the sunlight of a new day on her face.

Looking about she saw, not far away, a river flashing in the morning light, and beyond that a city with white towers, and spires of gold; and, farther still, the sunny fields and soft blue hills of a fair land, the fairest she had ever looked upon.

"Oh, Elfin-cow, is yonder Fairy-land?" she asked, and if the truth were told, she more than half expected that the cow would answer her!

But Elfin, sniffing the scent of the new day's air, was up and off without so much as a backward glance. She did not stop again till she had come to the shining river's brink. And the maid followed all the way.

As far as eye could see, the river ran like a silver road between green banks, but though the maid looked up the stream and down, she could spy no bridge; and she began to hope that here the cow would turn about and travel homeward.

But alack and alas! When the cow had drunk her fill at the river's edge, she stood and gazed across the water longingly as if home were upon the other bank!

The maid was half beside herself with fear.

"What if the cow should cross the stream?" thought she. "How could I go with her? Yet go I must."

Neither mortal folk nor fairy folk were near to aid her, but as she cast her eyes about she spied a rock at hand.

As quick as thought she mounted it, and from its height sprang upon Elfin's back. And none too soon! She scarce had time to draw a breath before the cow stepped down into the river.

The water rippled and bubbled and foamed about them. Little waves splashed against Elfin's sides and sent a rainbow spray above the cowmaid's head. And in every wave and every ripple and every bubble a sunbeam shone like a bright jewel.

Now the stream grew deep and deeper and the maid's heart was in her mouth, but she kept fast hold of Elfin's horns and the cow swam steadily as if she had been bred to it. Soon they were safe upon the farther bank.

The white city that the maid had seen was near the shining river, and as the cow, with the maid still on her back, climbed the green bank, a watchman ran from the city gates to meet them.

No sooner had he looked at the cow and looked at the maid than he began to bow and scrape and scrape and bow as if his wits had taken leave of him.

"Oh, lady fair! Oh, noblest queen!" he cried to the maid; and again he bowed and scraped and scraped and bowed. Never was such bowing and scraping.

"I am no lady or noble queen!" said the maid; "but just a village lass tending my mother's cow that has gone astray through wood and stream. And as my duty is, I go with her, lest harm befall her. I prithee, sir, give me a halter for her neck, that I may lead her home."

But the man threw his cap into the air and shouted as if he had gone joy-mad. And another watchman came running from the gate.

No sooner had *he* looked at the cow and at the maid on the cow's back than he threw *his* cap into the air and shouted; and another man coming after him did the same, and another and another, till around the maid and her cow stood a great throng of shouting folk.

Some were dressed in rags, and some in smocks, and some in fine attire, but they all shouted alike. There was no end to the noise that they made.

The cowmaid was fairly bewildered with it, but Elfin stood her ground, blinking her eyes and chewing her cud as contented as if she were at home.

"Take them to the King," cried one of the throng.

"Aye, to the King they must go," cried each and all.

Elfin-cow went with them through the gate as quietly as if she were on the way to pasture, and the maid sat on her back, looking with wondering eyes at the crowd about them.

If there had been a thousand men outside the wall, there were ten times as many in the city streets, and the shouting was ten times as great; and to make things merrier, the bells in all the steeples began to ring as the cow and the maid went by.

Through street and lane, by houses and towers gay with banners, they went, till they came to a great oak-tree, where the King awaited them.

He was no other than the wise young King of whom the swineherd and the goose-girl and the shepherdess had talked in the pasture; though this the cowmaid did not know. But that he was as handsome as a king should be she saw at once.

The King's chief counsellor stood beside him with a parchment roll in his hand.

"The prophecy! The prophecy! Read us the prophecy," cried the people, but the counsellor would

not read till the maid had told her tale from start to finish.

"A good tale and well told," said the counsellor; then opening his roll, he read slowly and clearly so that all might hear:

> "Joy, Peace, Prosperity,
> In the King's land there shall be
> When, with Duty for her guide,
> On strange steed a maid shall ride
> Through the river's silver sheen,
> Hitherward to be our Queen."

"Wilt thou be my Queen?" asked the King smiling at the maid. And the place where they stood was as still as a church on Monday. No one so much as breathed till the maid answered:

"If thou wilt fetch my mother and take care of Elfin-cow, I will," said she. And then such a shout went up as was never heard before nor since in the King's land. 'Tis a wonder that the King's folk did not split their throats that day!

Elfin-cow was given the greenest pasture in the land and two cowmaids and a cowherd to wait upon her, and a silver bell with a golden clapper was hung on a rope of silk around her neck.

And the maid's mother was fetched in the King's own chariot to the wedding, which was that very day.

But if you ask about the crown and the slippers that the Queen wore at the wedding, I can only tell what was told to me;—they fitted her as if they had been made for her.

Fifth Night

ENTER A CHAPMAN

Again the Guests were gathered all
For merry-making in the Hall.
Soon to the Squire came servitor
"A wayfarer is at the door,
A Chapman he, or some such wight,
Asking for food and bed to-night."

Quick answer did the good Squire make;
"Let him come in, for Christ's sweet sake.
Unsuccored goes none from this door,
And God grant, when I am no more,
And my son in my place shall be,
That he, in this, will follow me
As I my forbears; and pass on
This rule of mercy to his son."

In came the Stranger. On his back
Sagged heavily a well-stuffed pack.
So muffled was he from the cold,
What sort he was could scarce be told.
With mumbled words and manner gruff,
He told of journey long and rough,
And weary feet; of how the word
From certain Maytime travelers heard
About a good Squire, said to be
Much given to hospitality

Had made him bold enough to call
For food and shelter at this Hall.

"What say you? Travelers who spoke
Of me? Was there among these folk
A Chapman with good wares to sell
And many a merry tale to tell?"

"Aye!" said the man in louder tone,
"'Twas he who had the good Squire known,
And Little Son, and Lady kind,
And Nurse so fat 'twas hard to find
Doors wide enough ——"
"Now, now! Have done!
Let not thy tongue too nimbly run!"
The Nurse cried, quickly drawing near,
"Thou Saucebox! 'Tis but all too clear
Thou art that Chapman's self,—as bold
And foolish talking as of old."

The Squire now looked on him again,
"My faith, 'tis so!" "Our Chapman?" then
The Lady cried.
"None else," quoth he.
"And pleased to serve this Company
With finest wares and finest tales,—
My stock of either never fails."
Then, counting on the Squire's good-will,
The Chapman, fain to show his skill
To some new listeners, lost no time
In reeling out this jolly rhyme.

LARRY'S WOOING

When Larry set eyes upon Meggy,
  Sweet Meggy,—a rose of a girl,
'Twas Larry whose heart went a-pit-pat,
  'Twas Larry whose brain was a-whirl.
To win her (O dearest! O sweetest!),
  Young Larry a-wooing would go;
But always some mishap befell him
  When trying his fond love to show.

Poor Larry! I trow there was never a lad
Whose mishaps in wooing were like what he had.

On Mayday he carried a nosegay,
  The fairest that spring could afford,
To hang on Meg's door in the twilight,
  And happy was he as a lord.
But while at the latch-string he fumbled
  The door on a sudden flew wide,
And "Save us!" cried Meg and her mother
  As Larry fell sprawling inside.

Poor Larry! I trow there was never a lad
With mishaps the like of what Larry-lad had.

In moonlight fond lovers go singing—
  And Larry would sing to his love:
"Oh, beam on me, dear one," he lilted;
  But bang! went the casement above,

And who but Meg's wrathful old father
With nightcap awry should look down?—
Sweet Meggy was tending her grandam,
Afar off in Lochmaben town!

Poor Larry! did ever ye hear of a lad
Whose ill-luck in wooing was like what he had?

"Perchance a fine gift to my sweetheart
Might tell what my lips dare not speak,"
Thought he, and for proper love-token
Both hither and yon did he seek.
A bird in a gilded cage chose he,
("Its love-song she'll take as mine own.")
Alack! not a chirp did it utter
To Meg, but sat mum as a stone!

Poor Larry! did ever ye hear of a lad
Who all through his wooing such ill fortune had?

But long is the lane with no turning
And Larry's good fortune was nigh.
For, caught in a show'r he saw Meggy
Unsheltered and ready to cry;
Must frock and fine bonnet be ruined?
Nay, nay! for 'twas Larry could run.
His plaid he wrapped round her right boldly
And hark ye! Sweet Meggy was won!

Hey, laddies! I hope when ye're wanting to marry
Ye'll have as good fortune in wooing as Larry!

THE CHAPMAN FEASTS

With Larry's wooing brought to happy end,
The Chapman kitchenward his steps must bend;
And ne'er saw hungry trav'ler better fare
Than he found spread upon the table there;
The Squire's own venison and Christmas goose,
A steaming rabbit stew with savory juice,
Great well-filled pasties, cakes, white bread and black,
Plum pudding, sauces rich, of sweets no lack.

"Eh, but a man would come twice twenty miles
For such a feast as this,"—with broadest smiles
The Chapman said; and fell to, with a wish
To taste if might be every offered dish.

The children came to stand inside the door,
Some ne'er had seen this wondrous man before.
Think! Oftener he to London Town had been
Than Squire or Justice! And to look within
His pack was, so the children thought, to see
Such marvels as in fairy hoard might be.

"I'd rather be a Chapman, that I would,
Than Squire," the Little Son said.
"Oh, how good,"
Another whispered, "are the tales he brings!"
The Chapman's quick ear caught their whisperings

And, beckoning to the children to come near,
"'Tis true," said he, "that Chapmen often hear,
As up and down and roundabout they go,
Much that the country gentry never know.
I'll tell ye one more tale."
When this was heard
The children waited not but sped the word.
And all their elders, eager as were they,
Into the dim old kitchen came straightway.
Their flower-hued garb with color filled the room
Till it was like a garden plot in bloom.
And bright below the well-scoured pans upon
The kitchen walls, the joyous faces shone.

The Chapman took the Guests' expectancy
As tribute to his proved ability.
And proud as peacock,—though a man of sense,—
He told this tale to please his audience.

THE LAD WHO LOST THE CHRISTMAS CAKE

ONCE upon a time an old wife who lived in the village here had the thought to send a Christmas cake to her sister who lived in the village yonder.

"'Twill be a rare treat for the poor soul," said she, "for 'tis aye true that another's baking hath a better taste than what cometh from a body's own oven, though the difference between the two may be no more than a grain of salt." And she set to work to make the cake forthwith.

What she put into the cake is a long story, for there was flour of the finest, and sugar of the sweetest, and spices of every kind; fresh yellow butter, creamy milk, plums as large as a man's thumb, and yeast, the secret of which no one knew but herself; and all mixed and stirred together—oh, never was such toothsome batter as the old wife made!

"But mixing the cake is but half of the battle," said she as she put the cake into the oven. "'Tis the baking proveth the cook." And she had no peace till the cake was done, and she had tested it with a straw, —which is the best way to try a cake, as everybody knows.

"Eh, but it is a fine cake! I wish I had the eating of it," said her son Peter who stood by to watch her.

"Would ye be wishing the cake out of your poor

aunt's mouth?" cried his mother fetching him a blow, though not to hurt, for to tell the truth he was the apple of her eye.

It was Peter who was to take the cake to the aunt, and when the good dame had wrapped it in as many covers as though it were to go on a hundred-mile journey, she put it into a bag and gave it to the laddie with many a caution about the care of it.

"'Tis likely enough that with all your capers on the road 'twill be naught but a heap of crumbs when your aunt sees it," said she, heaving a sigh.

"Nay, I shall go as slow as a snail," said Peter, who was as good-natured a laddie as ye might ever hope to find.

"What! Slow as a snail, say ye, when your poor aunt is watching and waiting for her bit of Christmas cheer!" cried the dame.

"How can she be watching and waiting for what she does not know is coming?" asked Peter; but the old wife would have none of his questioning.

"Nimble-Trimble is a better man than Chatter-Clatter, so keep your tongue still and let your feet trip it," said she.

Yet Peter was scarce beyond the gate when she was calling after him:

"Laddie, if ye love me, let none know what is in the bag."

"But if any ask me, what shall I say?" questioned poor Peter.

"Ye might put them off with another question,"

said the dame. "'What have ye in your bag?' ask they. 'What is the name of Twickenham Town?' say ye."

"But if they will not be put off?" asked Peter, who was beginning to think that taking the cake to his aunty was no easy task.

"Then try them with a riddle," said his mother. "'What is in the bag? 'Tis round as a cheese and brown as the bees. Come answer me that,' say ye."

"But what next?" said Peter anxiously.

"Oh, well, if they must know, then must ye tell the truth," said Goody; "so speak up boldly and say this: 'It's naught but a bit of an old wife's baking that she thinks more of than other folk do.'"

"'Twould be easier to say cake," objected Peter; but his mother would not hear to this.

"'Tis easier, but tempting," said she. "All the children in the town will follow at your heels if ye say cake."

Peter was fairly glad when all the cautions and riddles and the like came to an end and he was started on his way.

He tried to be both brisk and careful as his mother had bidden him, and all went well with him and with the cake till he came upon a juggler, who stood in a painted cart by the roadside, doing marvelous tricks.

There was many a one who stopped to see the juggling,—chapmen and traders, country folk riding to town, and town folk going to the country; and Peter stopped, too.

Eh, but the juggler could do wonderful things! Now he was sending golden balls spinning into the air one after another, and catching them so fast that to watch him made a body's head dizzy. Now he was finding posies in the basket of eggs that a farmer's lass was taking to town. And no sooner did his eyes fall upon Peter standing with gaping mouth at the edge of the crowd than he cried:

"There is a lad who hath a fortune in his cap, but he doth not know it;" and he beckoned Peter to come near.

"Go, go," cried those who stood about him, but the lad hung back.

"'Tis an old cap of my mother's making; the wool came from our black sheep and there's no fortune in it," said he.

"If there's naught in the cap, good sirs," said the juggler to the crowd, "it is an easy thing to prove." And he beckoned Peter again. "Come, lad," he said, "lend your cap and ye shall see what ye shall see."

What with the juggler's beckoning, and the pushing and urging of the crowd, poor Peter did not know what to say or do; and so at last, leaving his bag upon a stone, he went forward, cap in hand.

"Fortune's cap," cried the juggler; and though it passeth all belief, he began to draw farthings and halfpence, and pennies out of the cap in Peter's hand.

"They are none of mine," cried Peter; "nor my mother's; and I'll have naught to do with them."

"Then must I find the owner," said the juggler;

and winking at the crowd, he whistled loud and clear; whereupon there came from out the cart a wee doggie with a bush of hair about its face.

"This," said the juggler solemnly, "is an enchanted dog, though what he was before the enchantment fell upon him, none can tell. There was a man who knew but he is dead,—alack-a-day!" Then turning to the wee doggie, he asked, "Is the money thine?" And the dog barked once, twice, and thrice, while the crowd laughed.

Peter was fairly bewildered with it all. He scarce had wit enough to go back to the stone for his bag, and that he got his face turned toward his aunty's again was more by good luck than good management.

But once started he was soon out of the laughing crowd and would have gone apace had it not been for the weight of the bag that he carried.

Never was there Christmas cake of the weight of this one!

"I wonder I had not noted it before," thought Peter. "But I was fresher at the start."

He had not gone three rods when he must stop to rest and blow, under a tree.

While he was resting, he spied a man running down the road and looking from side to side, as though he sought somewhat.

No sooner had Peter spied him than the man spied Peter and hailed him:

"Lad," said he, "what have ye in your bag?"

"Friend," said Peter, mindful of his mother's les-

sons, "can ye tell me the name of Twickenham Town?"

But his question did not please the man.

"Have done with jesting," said he. "What have ye in your bag?"

"In the bag," cried Peter. "Guess ye if ye can. 'Tis round as a cheese and brown as the bees."

The man was in no humor for riddles. "If ye will not tell me, I will see for myself," said he; and he laid hold upon the bag.

"It's naught but a bit of an old wife's baking that she thinks more of than other folk do," cried Peter withstanding him manfully.

But by this time the man had opened the bag; and there, save us all, lay a grindstone!

"Thief!" cried the man.

"Thief yourself!" cried Peter. "Where is the cake that my mother baked for her poor sister who is watching and waiting for it? Oh, the bonny cake so full of plums!" said he.

"I have naught to do with cake, but only with the grindstone that ye stole," said the man.

"Oh, the grand cake! Alack, what will my mother say!" wailed Peter.

He and the man stood in the road glaring at each other, and there they might be standing yet had not Master Juggler come up just then in his painted cart which a donkey drew.

"What's amiss?" asked he, stopping the donkey close by the angry pair.

And as there was no one else to judge for them, they laid the whole matter before him.

"I am an honest body from yonder farm," said the man, "fetching a grindstone home for my master who is a good master but short of temper and liking well to have what is his own. The grindstone being heavy I put it into a bag that I might bear it on my back. I and it would be at master's now, had I not tarried to watch your tricks. I did but lay the bag upon a stone to rest myself when this lad, who is a thief if ever thief there was, made off with it."

"Woe's me!" cried Peter. "I do mistrust me I am worse enchanted than the dog. My cap holds coin that is not mine; my cake is turned to stone, and I an honest lad am named a thief!" And lifting up his voice he began to weep.

"Have done," said the juggler. "I see good fortune waiting for ye yet;" and bidding Peter and the man turn their faces from him while he wove a spell, he began to chant strange words the like of which were never heard before:

> "Zick zack zanery, quick, quack, quee,
> Ickery, nickery, chick, chack, chee,
> Lub, dub, dickery, snick, snack, snee!"

And though it passeth all belief, when Peter and the man turned about at the juggler's bidding, they spied in the road *two* bags where only one had been before!

The old wife's cake lay safe and sound in one of

them and Peter lost no time in taking it to his aunt, for 'tis ill to trust magic over long.

And that it was magic, and nothing but magic that brought back the Christmas cake when it was lost, Peter believed and told all the days of his life.

But folk in plenty said that the juggler had found Peter's bag where he had left it, and that this was the secret of the whole matter.

Alack and alas! There are always folk who will not believe in magic things.

Sixth Night

THE SQUIRE'S LADY CATECHISES THE CHILDREN

Upon the children who had come to bide
Within the Hall, through merry Christmastide,
The Squire's Lady put much loving thought;
Delighted watched their play; and never aught
Was counted burden by her, could it add
To joy of any little lass or lad.

For every hurt she could a balm provide
And childish tears by her were quickly dried,
In generous dole upon their wheaten bread
She the rich jam or golden butter spread.
She planned new games or quieted the throng
With music from her harp, or lively song.

But though she sought the children's happiness,
To teach them somewhat was her wish no less.
So, on the Sunday night, she tenderly
Gathered the little ones about her knee,
Saying she had a mind to question them
About the holy Child of Bethlehem.
If they paid heed and answered well, she would
Reward them with a tale for being good.

Then asked the Squire's Lady, "Who was born
Long, long ago, on blessed Christmas morn?"
"The Baby Jesus." Soft the answer came,
As rev'rently they spoke the hallowed name.

"And where slept He?" "In manger, on the hay."
"Who were the first to tell the news that day?"
"God's holy angels, singing in the sky,"
The children in sweet chorus made reply.
"Now tell what Baby Jesus wore in manger there."
"Nothing but swaddling clothes had He to wear."

"But great kings came, a long way traveling
To see the Baby, and their gifts to bring,"
The Squire's Little Son said. "Yes," she smiled.
"And we may give Him gifts." The littlest child
Broke out in prattle of the raisins sweet
That she would give when she the Babe should meet.
"And I will let Him play"—another said,
"With my best toys." The Lady shook her head.

"Nay, children, other gifts He'd have from you.
Obey your parents, speak but what is true,
Share with the poor, strive ever to do right;
These are the gifts that will our Lord delight.
But you have paid good heed and answered well,
And as I promised, I a tale will tell."

THE CHILD AND THE FOX

He was a little, little lad,
  But living at the ducal court
To learn from lords and pages there
  Knightly behavior, manly sport.

For he was fatherless. "And I,"
  Had said his mother, "little know
But love and women's arts; and he
  To true knight like his sire must grow."

"Aye, must he," had the great Duke said,
  And so the little lad had stayed;
But ever as he studied, rode
  Or with the younger pages played,

He thought of home. What though he now
  Lived in a palace, feasted oft,
Went richly clad in garments gay,
  'Neath silken coverlet slept soft?

To him his home was fairer far,
  Than palace proud with pomp and state.
That home with roses round the door
  And giant oak-tree by the gate.

He in his small white bed at home
  His mother's step or song could hear;
And food—'twas strange the Duke ne'er had
  Such bread, such milk, such honey clear!

Thus longed the little lad for home,
  But he must at the Castle bide
And do his tasks, his lessons learn,
  Be brave, and all his longing hide.

One day the Duke from hunt returned,
  A silver fox as trophy brought.
And caged the trembling woodland thing
  Though for its liberty it fought.

"Hast seen the fox?—the silver fox?"
  The Courtiers to each other cried.
"Rare beast! the Duke will have it tamed."
  But trick and lure in vain were tried.

From side to side the creature raged,
  Or quiet lay in sullen fear;
Bit fiercely at the shining bars,
  Then through them longingly would peer.

The little lad with pity saw.
  "Thou likest not a cage," said he.
And by a sudden impulse led
  Threw wide the door. "Thou shalt be
    free!"

By chance no folk were thereabout
  Save but the little lad alone.
He lifted quick the postern latch
  And in a flash the fox was gone!

But heavy, sickening fear came o'er
  The child when he had done this deed;
What would the Duke say when 'twas known
  That he the silver fox had freed?

Grim tales were told of culprits flogged,
  Or kept in dungeons dark as night;
Great dukes could punish as they would.
  "O Mother!" sobbed the child in fright.

But no one knew what he had done.
  They argued from the open cage
The fox himself had loosed the door
  Leaping about in frantic rage.

Not less unhappy was the child
  Because none gave him word of blame.
Grief-burdened was his heart all day
  And sadder grew as nightfall came.

No use to say, "'Twas but a fox,"
  Or "Doubtless 'twill again be caught,"
Or yet, "A deed once done is done,"
  For clear through all came better thought.

"Deceive no one; speak truth; be brave;"
His mother's voice spoke to his heart.
"Knight like thy father wouldst thou grow,
These practise whilst a child thou art."

Yes, right it was that he confess
His fault;—naught else would do,—but when?
Next day? The Duke would hunt. Next night?
Nay, Yuletide revels opened then.

Again he seemed to hear a voice:
"When thou hast done a wrong, make haste
To set it right." The little lad
Dared not more time or courage waste,

But choking back a sob, he rose
From his soft bed, ran down the stair,
Nor stopped till in the stately Hall
He stood beside the great Duke's chair.

Quick came his trembling, childish voice.
Scarlet his face, low drooped his head.
"'Twas I who freed thy silver fox;
It—wanted—to—go home," he said.

The last words came out sobbingly.
The Duke looked at his lady dear
Whose eyes were wet; then grave as judge
He gave the child this sentence clear:

"To free my fox, thou hadst no right.
For that deed punished thou must be;
So from my sight and from my court
All Christmas Day, I banish thee.

"But for thy truthful tongue, and for
The courage shown in Fear's despite,
Since truth and courage well become
The child who hopes to be a knight,

"I do decree that without fail
Thy whole long day of banishment,—
Thy Christmas Day,—dost hear me, Child?—
Shall in thy mother's home be spent."

Seventh Night

WASSAILING THE APPLE-TREES

And now had come the very night
To celebrate the ancient rite
Of wassailing the apple-trees.
The big Squire, jovial as you please,
Headed the train from out the Hall,
Of Guests and servants, leading all
Into the orchard's ample ground;
There, every tree they marched around
And 'neath it, on the frosty sward
A little spicy wassail poured.
And while they went their winding way
They chanted out in sing-song gay:

"Wassail, wassail
Flowing free,
Here's to thy health
Good Apple-Tree.
Here's to thy health
From root to top,
Prithee to give us
A thumping crop!
Here's to thy health
From top to root
Prithee to heap all
Our bins with fruit.
Apples red, apples yellow,
Apples tart or sweet and mellow,

Apples green or russet-brown,
With apples be all boughs weighed
down.
Wassail, wassail
Flowing free,
Here's to thy health
Good Apple-Tree!"

Thus had the trees their wassailing
That was to work their prospering.

The Guests from wassailing returned
Again sat where the Yule Log burned.
And the good Squire would hear of naught
But that some apples should be brought,
"The finest fruit in England grown,
If I may boast thus of mine own.
Taste, shape, size, color of the best.
Come now, pray put them to the test."

"And why not have a tale the while?"
Queried the Vicar with a smile.
"The Squire here, knows his apples well,
While we feast, he a tale might tell."

Loud did the Guests this speech applaud.
The Squire, although he hemmed and hawed,
Was not unready. "Aye, I knew
Thou'dst say a tale from me was due;
So my poor brain I've had to rack
And mem'ry has brought this tale back."

TO THE KING'S TASTE

THERE was once a poor gentleman who married a wife as poor as himself. She had no more dowry than if she were a church-mouse.

Yet when the wedding was over and the fare-ye-wells had all been said, Father-in-law came running out in haste.

"Thou shalt not go empty-handed," said he to his daughter; and bidding her to leave it unopened till she had come to her new home, he thrust a parcel into her hand.

"Well," thought the poor gentleman, "I have done better than I knew;" for though he loved his wife with all his heart, he was not sorry to have a little help to keep the pot boiling.

"Let us see what thou hast," said he when they had gone a space; but his wife shook her head.

"Did not my father bid me leave it unopened till we reached our home?" she asked.

"True," said the poor gentleman. "And an obedient daughter will make a good wife, I'll warrant me."

He did not speak of the gift again, but bent his mind on guiding Moll, the mare that carried them, into the easiest and pleasantest ways that he could find.

In all good time they came to their home, and no sooner had they crossed the threshold than the wife opened the parcel. "Look," cried she, holding up a tiny sapling no larger than a switch. "'Tis a growth of the great apple-tree that stands by the doorstone of my father's house."

Do what he could, the poor gentleman lost countenance at the sight of such a gift; but when he saw how pleased his wife was with it, he put his disappointment from him.

"'Twill bear us many a rosy apple for a dumpling or a pie, I'll wager ye," said he; and he was for fetching a spade straightway and planting the little apple-tree by the garden gate.

"But nay," said the wife, "let us plant it by *our* doorstone. Then whenever I look out I shall see it and be reminded of my old home."

"A good thought," said the poor gentleman; and he planted the tree just where his wife wanted it and was well pleased with his work.

The little tree thrived beyond all expectation. It was not long in the ground when it began to stretch itself toward the sun and to send out tiny branches and green leaves. By its third summer, it cast a shade upon the doorstone. And it blossomed and bore fruit a year ahead of its time!

It was a proud day for the poor gentleman and his wife when the first ripened apple glowed among the branches,—a rosy-red, streaked-with-gold, mouth-tempting apple!

"Just like the ones that grew on my father's tree," said the wife proudly.

The poor gentleman was for fetching a knife and dividing the apple between his wife and himself straightway. But the wife had another plan.

"'Tis good luck to give away the first fruit of a tree," she said. "'Twill bear the better for it." And she was just about to suggest that they give the apple to the parson when to her surprise her husband spoke out:

"Then I shall take it to the King," said he.

"The King!" cried his wife. "But ye have naught to wear to the King's court. Your Sabbath suit is well-nigh threadbare, and ye have no lace ruffles for your coat, as the fashion is."

"A threadbare suit may hold an honest man and a loyal man and a gentleman," said her husband; "and as for lace, let Jack-a-dandy wear it if he will. I'll go as merrily without it." And he went straightway to saddle Moll, the mare.

While her husband was doing this, the wife lost no time in pressing a ruff for his neck, and brushing his suit, and putting a new riband on his hat. And so skilful was she that when the poor gentleman started out on his journey she was very well pleased with his appearance.

The apple, wrapped in a napkin white as housewife's art could make it, lay in his pocket, and he was careful in his riding not to go over-fast lest he bruise

the fruit, which cautious plan well suited Moll, the mare.

It was late when he reached London Town and he stopped at an inn for the night, but he was up and off to the King's palace betimes on the morrow.

Many were at the court that day, and the poor gentleman having none to herald him and nothing but his name (though that was as old and good as any), to vouch for him, had to wait long for his turn to speak to the King.

Every one who came before the King that day had a favor to ask, or a plaint to make. One wanted a company of soldiers, and another an estate. This one was vexed because the King preferred his brother to himself, and that one was cast down because he could not have what was his neighbor's. Even the court ladies came with pretty smiles and curtsies to beg a masque or ball.

It was weary work being a King, thought the poor gentleman, who saw and heard much while he bided his time patiently.

At last, however, the suppliants were answered, the courtiers relaxed themselves; for a moment the King was left alone; and seizing his opportunity, the poor gentleman stepped forward, hat in hand.

"If it please Your Majesty," said he. "I am a poor gentleman ——"

"Aye, aye," interrupted the King hastily; "and come to ask the King to make ye rich, I'll warrant ye. They all ask that."

"Nay, sire," said the poor gentleman. "*I* have but come to say 'God bless Your Majesty,' and to give you this," and he took from his pocket the rosy-red, streaked-with-gold apple.

The very sight of it was enough to make any man's mouth water, and the King was as human as any.

"King Solomon himself liked an apple," quoth he, taking the fruit from the poor gentleman; and he ate it from skin to core, before he spoke another word.

Nor is there any doubt that the apple was to his taste; for no sooner had he eaten it than he wrote with his own hand, a grant of certain orchard lands to Roger Fairlie, Gentleman. "*Upon condition,*" so the writing read, "*that every year he bring or send an apple to the King.*"

A prouder, happier, more astonished man than our poor gentleman, thus made a landed squire, ye cannot well imagine!

"Who would ever have thought," he said to himself as he posted home as fast as Moll, the mare, could go, "that Father-in-law's gift would be the making of our fortune?"

But when he got home he found that his wife had often thought this very thing. And a well-pleased woman she was that her thought had come true.

APPLE-ROASTING

THE VICAR said, "Now by my troth,
Apples and tale were tasty both.
And both we've swallowed, tho' I see
Still heaped the apple-baskets be.
And doubtless in the good Squire's brain
Dozens of stories yet remain."

"Nay, nay!" the Squire was almost stern.
"I did my duty, took my turn.
No well-filled basket is my pate,
Not one more tale can I relate.
An't please you, though," went on the Squire,
"We'll roast some apples by the fire."
The Guests cried "Yes! Yes! Best of fun,
Let's apples roast." So said, so done.

Redder and redder faces burned,
And testing fingers caution learned.
The apples hissed and sputtered loud,
And gayer grew the laughing crowd.
Soon 'twas proposed that added fun
'Twould bring if that unlucky one
Whose apple burned, as penalty
The next to tell a tale should be.

Small wonder was it, the mischance
Befell that matron whose quick glance
Oft wandered to her little flock.
One child called, "Mother, look at Jock!
A monster of an apple, his!"
"And, Mother, see how red mine is!"
"Oo-ooh! Mine has fallen to the floor.
Please, Mother, tie it up once more."

With many such-like calls to heed,
Whose apple would not burn, indeed?
And it was not to be denied,
Her apple had a blackened side.
She, laughing, said she would not shirk;
'Twas oft a part of Mother's work
To tell a tale or sing a song,
When bairns were ill, or things went wrong.
So with her youngest on her knee
For quieting, this tale told she:

THE LITTLE WISE WOMAN

THERE was once upon a time a mother who had but one child, and he was the very joy of her life.

He was the finest baby in the world—there was no doubt in her mind about that—and his skirts were not yet shortened when she began to think what he would be when he was a man.

If she went to market and saw there a merchant who was busy and honest and thrifty, she said to herself, "It is such a one my Jack will be some day."

If, as often happened, the Squire upon his prancing horse rode by her door, she straightway thought, "My Jack will have a nag and lands if he lives long enough."

And on a Sunday when she sat in church to hear the lesson read, she wondered if it were not after all a Vicar that her Jack should be.

But when Jack had grown to be a great lad and it was full time for him to begin to show what was in him, he did nothing at all!

If his mother left him to shell peas for dinner, he upset the pan and let the peas lie scattered for the fowls to eat.

If she sent him on an errand, he forgot it, dawdling on the way to listen to the birds or watch the squirrels.

And as for a trade or business, naught suited him. This was too hard, and that was too dull. He did not like this, and he would not learn that.

His mother was at her wits' end; and her husband being dead and she left with none to advise her, she went to the little wise woman whose house stood under a hill in the very village where Jack and his mother lived.

The little wise woman was used to giving advice. Nobody in the village did anything worth the doing without consulting her. And she knew something about everything, from the setting of a hen to the curing of a fever.

But when the mother first told her of Jack, she had nothing to say, but sat puzzling and pondering, with her head on her hands.

"He thought that naught would suit him so well as to be a fiddler," said the mother, "but when I bought him a fiddle, he could get no music out of it. He started to London Town with the drover, but the way was too long and he turned back at the first milestone; and the blacksmith would have taught him his craft, but the laddie could not abide the noise," said she.

"M-m," murmured the little wise woman, lost in her thoughts.

"The lads in the village laugh at him so that he will not try in their races and games. Always he is afraid of laughter and jests and failure, yet he is as clever a lad as any, though I say it myself who shouldn't," said the mother.

"M-m," murmured the little wise woman, looking away into the distance.

"All of his life I have watched him and shielded him and worked for him!" cried the mother. "There is nothing that a body can do that I have not done for Jack."

"Oh, yes," said the little wise woman, coming out of her puzzling and pondering as bright and as sharp as a new pin. "You can leave him to do for himself."

"What does that mean?" asked the mother, for she did not like the sound of it. "And what good is it?"

"If you will promise to stay with me till I bid you to go, and will do what I say, you shall see," said the little wise woman.

The mother was not wishful to do this.

"There is no one to look after the house, nor feed the chickens and pig and cow, nor tend to the milking. And who would cook my poor Jack's porridge? —pray tell me that,—for cook it himself he cannot," said she.

"Besides," she went on, her eyes beaming, "the lad could never bear me from his sight. 'Tis 'Mother, Mother' from morn till eve with my Jack."

"So much the better," said the little wise woman; and in the end she had her way. The mother promised and stayed.

And a surprised lad was Jack when he came home and found her gone. He looked for her through the house, and in the dooryard where the chickens were

waiting for their supper, and out in the barn-lot where the cow was lowing to be milked, and at the pen where the little white pig was grunting and grumbling. And when he found her in none of these places, he went to seek her in the village.

"Is my mother here?" he asked at every door; and so in time he came to the little wise woman's house with his question.

"Yes, she is here," said the little wise woman, looking at the lad with her bright twinkling eyes as if she had never really seen him before. And he living in the same village with her!

"Then bid her hasten home," said Jack, "or the chickens will go to roost hungry. The cow must be milked and the pig is not fed, and there is naught but dry bread for ourselves," said he.

"She will go if you will carry her on your back," said the little wise woman.

"On my back?" stammered the lad. "Why, the whole village would be laughing if they should see me carrying my mother on my back through the streets!"

"Then she must stay where she is," said the little wise woman shutting the door in his face; and she did not open it again.

There was naught for Jack to do but go home, so home he went. But he did not feed the creatures, nor milk the cow, nor cook his porridge. All the supper he had that night was a slice of bread; and he had no heart to eat that.

Early the next morning he was at the little wise woman's house.

"I have come to carry my mother home," said he.

"On your back?" asked the little wise woman.

"Aye, on my back," said the lad with his head hung down. But his mother was a proud woman at his words, you may be sure.

When she was ready with her bonnet on her head, and her shawl about her shoulders, she stood on a chair to get on the laddie's back.

"Good-bye and thank ye," said she to the little wise woman; but alack and alas! Jack had not gone farther than the door when he began to stagger beneath her weight. If it had not been for the little wise woman, he would have tumbled from the doorstone into the tansy bed. There was naught to do but put the mother down.

"I am not strong enough to carry her," cried the lad, as hot and angry as a young turkey cock.

"Then she must stay where she is," said the little wise woman; but she looked kindly on him, and when he was gone she and the mother cried together for love of him.

And as for Jack he went home and cried. Great lad as he was, the tears rolled down his cheeks. He wanted his mother, and he was hungry besides. But how to get his porridge, he did not know, unless he made it himself; and he did not know how to make it.

The first potful he burned, and the next he upset, and the third was lumpy. Having nothing better to

eat, he ate it, but it only made him want his mother the more.

The chickens crowded about the door looking so forlorn and hungry that Jack threw them some of the luckless porridge and crumbled a crust for them. And though he could not have told the reason why, he felt the better for doing it.

"Moo," called the cow from the barn-lot,—and a mournful sound it was.

Jack went out to pull down a bundle of fodder for her; and he even tried to milk her, but to say that he did well at it would not be the truth.

Then there was the little white pig with his nose through the pen, begging for breakfast.

"Shall I never have done with ye all?" said Jack, yet when he had tended them he sat down among the creatures for company.

"I wish I were strong! I wish I were strong!" said he; and if wishing could have made him strong, he would have been a Samson by supper-time.

His heart was sore with loneliness and longing for his mother, yet when night came, he fed the creatures again, and milked the cow. This time he got enough milk to cover his porridge; and as for the porridge, though it was not the kind that his mother made, it was neither burnt nor lumpy.

Early the next morning, he was at the little wise woman's house with a question:

"What shall I do to get strong?"

The little wise woman's eyes twinkled like dew-

drops in the sun as she listened and her face was full of smiles. But she did not hurry her answer. Instead she sat down on her doorstone with her head on her hand and looked away into the distance, till Jack thought she had forgotten him.

Just as he thought this, she came out of her puzzling and pondering as bright and as sharp as a new pin.

"Here is a bargain," said she: "I have first one thing and then another to send to my cousin in Bolton-town, and if you will take them for me you shall know what I know about getting strong."

Jack was well pleased with this, and he was for starting out right then to Bolton-town with all the things. But the little wise woman shook her head.

"All at once is a lazy man's load," said she.

"But when shall I know about getting strong?" asked Jack who was none too patient.

"When the work is done," said the little wise woman; and she bade him come on the morrow's morn to begin the task.

Whether he would or no, Jack must do as she said; but he went home in good spirits.

"Ye'll see me come through the gate with my mother on my back yet!" he said to the chickens and the cow and the little white pig in the pen.

Early the next morning, he was at the little wise woman's house, but early as he was, she was waiting for him with a sack of shucks by her side.

"Here is a present for my cousin," said she; "and my love goes with it."

Jack may have thought it was a queer present or he may not, but he picked it up and slinging it across his back, he started to Bolton-town at a fine pace.

"If you keep that up, you will outrun yourself," called the little wise woman; but Jack did not keep it up. He had not gone far when he slackened his speed and shifted the sack from one shoulder to another.

It took him a good part of the day to get to Bolton and it was sunset when he came again with the empty sack to the little wise woman's house.

If she thought he had been long on the road, she said naught of it but bade him come again on the morrow's morn.

But when Jack got home the creatures were making such a stir about his lateness that he was fairly bewildered with their noise.

"I shall be earlier to-morrow," he promised, just as if they could understand every word he said. And he patted the little white pig on the head besides. And being more used to the walking, he kept his word when the morrow came.

This day it was a bundle of sticks that he took, and the next a peck of potatoes. A bushel of apples, a truss of straw, and a packet of wool went to the cousin; and many another thing.

More than once it was only a bag of stones that Jack

carried; but no matter what the little wise woman sent, he took it to Bolton-town without a word.

Rain or shine, good road or bad, he was at the little wise woman's house to keep his bargain. And if he wondered sometimes when there would be an end to all this present-sending, nobody knew of it unless it were the chickens and the cow and the little white pig.

The village lads were not long in finding out Jack in his new work, and then they were at their teasing, you may be sure.

"See Lazy Jack with a sack on his back," one would call; and another:

"If the sack break his back, 'tis the end of poor Jack." Or the whole crowd, laughing and shouting together, would keep step with him through the village street.

But Jack would pay no heed to them now.

"When I am strong, they'll be done with their laughing, I warrant ye," said he; and to show them how little he thought of them, he took to whistling.

But no sooner had he started it, than he liked it for itself. The more he whistled, the lighter his load seemed, and the shorter the road.

The little wise woman was astonished at his quickness these days, and you may be sure his mother heard of it.

All at once the lads left off teasing him. It was "Jack, whistle me 'Over the Hills and Far Away,'" and "Jack, whistle 'The Hunt is Up,'" and "Jack,

I'll carry your load to the west gate if you'll teach me to whistle."

Jack would not give his load to any one, but he was not ill pleased with company. And as for teaching a laddie a tune, it was naught but sport for Jack.

Almost before he knew it, he was friends with all the lads and every day when his errand for the little wise woman was done, he shared in their laughter and kept up with the best of them in their games.

He had learned to make good porridge by this time and he ate plenty of it, too, you may be sure. And he took such care of the creatures that the hens laid eggs every day, the cow gave two gallons at a milking, and the Squire himself stopped to praise the looks of the little white pig.

Jack would have been a proud lad and a happy one if only his mother had come home.

When he caught so much as a glimpse of her through the little wise woman's door, he was glad for a week; and if he wished once that he could bring her home on his back, he wished it a thousand times.

One morning he started off to the little wise woman's house with his mind made up to ask her when his task would be done. And he was hurrying along at a fine pace when he came upon a great sack of meal in the road. Spying the mill wagon from which it had fallen just ahead, the lad made haste to shoulder the bag and catch up with the cart.

" 'Tis a fine strength ye have to carry as much as a

man's weight as if it were a bag of feathers," said the driver as Jack came up.

"A man's weight!" cried Jack, and throwing the sack into the wagon he was off and away like a young colt on a frosty morning, before the driver could say so much as "Thank ye."

Jack did not stop till he saw the little wise woman waiting for him on her doorstone.

"I am strong!" he cried, never heeding that she had no present beside her for him to carry that morn. "I can lift the weight of a man! I can carry my mother home this very day."

"Aye," said the little wise woman. "Strength grows by use, and it's not for naught that you have trudged to Bolton-town with your burdens," said she; and opening her door she showed him his mother all ready and waiting to go home with him.

Jack was the happiest lad in the land as he marched away with her on his back.

He smiled at every one he met and every one smiled at him, and the mother smiled whether they met any one or not.

"The chickens and cow and little white pig will be glad when you are home again," said Jack, "but you need have no bother about them. I shall feed them and tend them, never fear.

"And I shall learn the blacksmith's craft or whatever you bid me; but it is a farmer I want to be, with fields, and fowls, and cattle, and pigs,—aye, and a nag as fine as the Squire's to ride," said he.

"I've always thought you would have a nag and lands if you lived long enough," said the mother. And she was a proud woman that day, you may be sure.

And what of the little wise woman? Oh, she was all smiles and twinkles as she stood on the doorstone watching Jack and his mother till they were out of sight.

"You can't make a rose out of a cabbage," said she to herself; "but there's always a chance to make a man out of a lad."

Eighth Night

THE WHITE MOON

LIKE great white flower that bloomed on high
The pale Moon glimmered in the sky.
And spread afar a magic glow
That touched with glamor all below.
The aged yew in that pale sheen
Took on an uncouth monster's mien.
The pond where cattle drank by day
A sheet of molten silver lay.
The road the Squire oft trotted down
To go to market, church, or town,
Lay 'neath the moonlight's ghostly gleam
A path of mystery or dream,
With crouching witches at its edge
That were by day the hawthorn hedge.

Romance in every shadow lurked.
While the White Moon her magic worked.
And as the flood of moonlight streamed
Into the Hall, till armor gleamed
And all things wore a radiance new,
Among the Guests, a silence grew
Such awesome silence as enfolds
Those whom in thrall deep wonder holds.
Or those who dream with open eyes.
Thoughts came of home, of high emprise,

Of friends, of love, adventures gay,
And even the children hushed their play
And laughter, though they knew not why.
The youngest child, to weeping nigh,
Must cuddle in her mother's arms,—
Safe refuge, whatsoe'er alarms.

Thus sat they in the moonlight there;
Only the clock upon the stair
Was heard, till musingly and low,
The timid Aunt who scarce did know
She spoke aloud, a few words dropped.
"Such moon there was," she said, then stopped,
And to the window raised her glance,
"And such white mystic radiance,
The night when Lady Elinore
Stole softly to the dungeon door——"

"Oh, 'tis a tale!" the children cried,
Aroused and crowding to her side.
"Yes, 'tis a tale," the Aunt confessed.
"Then tell! Pray tell it!" cried each Guest;
For the few words she had let fall
Had waked desire in them all
To hear; so in the moonlight pale
The Aunt began the touching tale.

WHAT BEFELL THE LADY ELINORE

(Part One)

Lady Elinore lived with her brother, a mighty Baron, in a great, grim castle beyond a forest.

She was kind, and gentle, and merciful; and he was hard, and fierce, and cruel; yet they loved each other. In the hour of a black wrath that came ofttimes upon the Baron, only Lady Elinore dared plead with him; and she could win his favor for a cause when all besides herself had failed.

But there came a time when she ventured too much for mercy's sake; and of what happened then thus runs the tale:

It chanced that once when the Baron was away at his wars, Lady Elinore and her tiring-woman sat a-singing.

Question and answer the song went between them:

"Who rideth here?"
"A knight, a gallant knight."
"What weareth he?"
"In crimson he is dight."
"Wilt read me his heart?"
"His heart is brave and gay,
As, seeking Glory's way,
He rideth hither."

But what the Red Knight did, or what befell him

is yet unsung; for the song had gone no farther when a flourish of trumpets broke in upon its melody. Hastening to the window, Lady Elinore beheld her brother, the Baron, on the Castle road with all his men-at-arms.

The men-at-arms who followed the Baron's banner were a dour and somber throng. They wore no feathers in their caps, nor scarfs, nor ladies' tokens, as the fashion was, to liven their dull garb. Yet as the lady watched them ride that day, she spied in their midst a gay, fluttering thing, bright as the flame of a Christmas fire. And she bade the tiring-woman look with her to see what it might be.

"Belike it is a plaid," said the tiring-woman. "Dost thou not recall the ones of green and blue my lord brought back last year from battle with the Scots?"

"Aye," said the lady gravely, for she had no joy in battles and the like.

"Or yet, perchance, it is a banner they have taken," said the tiring-woman. "My lord's is dark, but some are bright as flowers, so sayeth Wat, the armorer."

But when the company was close at hand, behold, the bright thing was a scarlet mantle, the wearer of which was a young lad with ruddy hair.

Lady Elinore sent the tiring-woman straightway to ask what lad this was, and all his history; for said she:

"Is it not strange that such a one should come so close upon the singing of our song of the Red Knight?"

The tiring-woman being of a mind to bring her lady

news, pinned every henchman whom she met fast to the wall till he had told her all he knew.

Yet when she had heard all, she scarce had heart to tell the tale, it was so sad. For the young lad was a prisoner condemned to die upon the morrow's morn.

Lady Elinore wept to hear; and as she wept, there came a messenger bidding her to sit at the Baron's feast that night.

"Go thou," said the tiring-woman, "for here is chance, say I, to plead the Red Lad's cause. Thou may'st save his life."

"True, I may," said Lady Elinore, and wiping away her tears she bade the tiring-woman deck her in her best.

The gown that Lady Elinore wore to the Baron's feast was blue as autumn haze upon the hills, the girdle about her waist was of reddest gold, and in the braids of her long hair were woven ropes of pearl, all of which became her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks so well that the tiring-woman clapped her hands at the sight of her; and the Baron was proud of her beauty.

Naught would do but that she must sit by his side, and drink from his cup, and share his dish at the feast. Nor was this all of his favor, for when his hunger was past and his thirst satisfied, he laid his hand upon her head and bade her ask what boon she would.

"Speak out," said he, "wilt thou have gems, or cloth of gold? Or wilt thou ride with me to the King's court when Yuletide comes?"

"Nay, none of these," said Lady Elinore; "but of

thy goodness, give to me for page the lad with ruddy hair and scarlet cloak who came with thee this day."

The boon was little to the Baron's liking, it was plain to see, and in spite of his promise, he would not grant it.

"The mantle thou canst have," said he, "but not the lad." And he laughed as though it were a fine jest he had made.

At this time Lady Elinore pleaded no more. Instead she sent the tiring-woman, who had stood the while behind her chair, to fetch her lute that she might sing a song; for not seldom she had soothed the Baron into softer mood with some sweet air. And with this in mind, she sang:

"Cowslip and cuckoo-bud,
Purple bloom of heather,
Hawthorn and eglantine
And thou and I together;

"Eyebright and meadow-rue,
Bell-flow'r lightly swaying;
Choose thou for me, and I for thee
When we are out a-Maying."

Though it was winter time the joy of spring was in her melody. The stern faces of the Baron's men broke into unaccustomed smiles as they sat listening. But though in years gone by the Baron had oft plucked the flowers of May with gentle Elinore, he heard her song unmoved, and when the maid took heart of grace to ask her boon once more: "Spare me the lad's life, dear my brother," he thrust her from him.

"I am no child to coax with pretty words," quoth

he. "Get thee to bed, and meddle not with what concerns thee not."

Lady Elinore dared not linger; yet the desire of her heart to save the lad was none the less because of the Baron's wrath.

No sooner had she gained her room than she sent the tiring-woman to inquire where the red-haired lad was prisoned; and the answer was brought, "In the dungeon beneath the castle keep."

"The dungeon 'neath the castle keep!" cried Lady Elinore. "Art sure?" she asked. "The dungeon 'neath the keep?"

"Aye, there," said the tiring-woman, wondering to see her lady's eyes grow glad at such ill news. "'Tis a black hole, dank as a marsh, and cold. A man might freeze there in midsummer, so sayeth Wat, the armorer."

Lady Elinore listened with but half an ear, she was so deep in thought. She knew a secret of the dungeon cell that even Wat, the armorer, did not know; nor any else besides the Baron's self; and could she get this secret to the lad all would be well. Yet if she told it she could ask no mercy at her brother's hands. Sister or not, his blackest wrath would fall on her; and how that wrath might vent itself none ever could foresee.

"The door of the dungeon is locked and barred," chattered the tiring-woman, "and a henchman stands to watch, as though the lad, poor soul, could break the iron bolts."

"So," thought Lady Elinore, "I could not tell the secret if I would." And she promised herself to think no more of the lad.

Nevertheless, she was fain to know the warder's name.

"What of this warder? Knew the armorer aught of him?" she asked.

"Aye, that did he," answered the tiring-woman, warming to her talk. "'Tis Wull of Ettrick's Dale, and a fit one for the task. 'Tis said that he would sack a church or burn a widow's house."

"He seemed not such a one to me when he lay sick-abed so long, but more of child than man. He never took a bitter brewing for his good but I must coax it down with promised sweet," said Lady Elinore; and in her heart she thought, "If I should ask it, he would let me in."

"'Tis said the Red Lad never fought before to-day," said the tiring-woman. "And his lady-mother would have kept him back. But the young must try their wings. And he dieth on the morrow!—Eh! but his flight was short and sad, my lady!

"Nathless," said she, "the lad is of house and line that my lord hateth and that hateth him. And the safest enemy is a dead one, so Wat, the armorer, sayeth." She would have rattled on through many a tale if her lady would have listened; but Lady Elinore was tired of talk.

"The hour is late and I am fain to be alone," said she. "Go thou to rest, good Nan;" and seeing her

humor, the tiring-woman went though she had liefer stayed.

Now when the tiring-woman was gone, Lady Elinore's tears fell fast, for she was sad and fearful; and there was none to give her counsel.

Again and again she put away the thought of the young lad and his plight, and as often it returned to grieve her, till praying God to bless her great adventure, she stole forth from her turret room to seek the dungeon cell.

But before she went there, she took for the lad's thirst a pitcher of milk from the buttery shelf, and a cake from the pantry store to stay his hunger. Bearing these, she hastened down long weary stairs, till in what seemed the very depth of earth, she spied the warder pacing to and fro.

By the light of a torch that was fastened in a ring upon the wall, Wull's face, all scarred and grim, looked likelier to belong to him of whose fierce deeds the tiring-woman told than to the one whom Lady Elinore had nursed.

"Let his face go—I'll test his heart," thought Lady Elinore, and, stepping from the darkness of the stair, she cried:

"Good Wull, dost thou remember how I fought with Death for thee?"

"Aye, aye, my lady," answered Wull, a crooked smile stealing across his rugged face.

"And how thou would'st not drink the bitter draught unless I brought thee honey?"

"Aye, that, too," said Wull, putting his hand before his mouth to hide his sheepish grins.

"Then for that time's sake, prithee let me in to this poor lad," said Lady Elinore.

"But the key, my lady," stammered the man. "The Baron hath it. It lieth beneath his pillow, and neither I nor thou canst enter here without his will."

At his words Lady Elinore's tower of hope came tumbling down. With all her forebodings, she had never dreamed of this. "Alas, poor lad!" she cried; and, seeing her distress, Wull hung his head as if he were to blame.

There seemed naught for her to do but climb the dreary stair and go her way, leaving the Red Lad to his fate. Yet no sooner had she turned her back upon the dungeon door than a desire to gain the key took hold upon her.

If she could slip into the Baron's room, and draw the key from underneath the pillow while he slept, the lad might yet be saved. But the risk was great. Too great, thought Lady Elinore.

"I have done all that mortal maid could do, and the lad's blood will not be on my head," she said aloud, as if she answered some one; and she turned aside to put the pitcher and the cake each in its place.

Say what she would, though, her longing to save the lad was as strong as ever; and she had not gone three steps when she began to bargain with herself.

"If when I come to my brother's room the door is

open I will adventure for this key; but if the door is closed I will go my way," she said. And leaving the food and drink at the head of the stair where she might find them quickly if need be, she went on tiptoe through the silent hall.

There was none to see nor hear her, but as she went it seemed as though two voices spoke to her.

Said one:

"What wicked thought is this to leave the lad's life to a chance! Would'st let him die because a door is closed when by the lifting of a latch he might be saved?"

And the other cried:

"Have done with shifting like a feather in the wind. If the door be closed, then closed door let it be."

But ere she could make choice which was the wiser counsel, Lady Elinore came to the Baron's room and the door was ajar.

A white moon rode in a cloudless sky that night and by its light which flooded all the room, Lady Elinore saw the Baron's face as dark and stern in sleep as it had been when she beheld it last; and at the pillow's edge, the handle of the key showed black as soot against the linen of the bed.

"Now God be with me," she prayed; and putting fear behind her, she stole noiselessly across the oaken floor.

The Baron's slumber was as deep and sound as though he never had done cruel deed. Even when Lady Elinore with trembling fingers drew the key

from beneath the pillow, the Baron did not wake nor stir. And she gained the hall again, breathless but safe.

Now when Lady Elinore returned to the dungeon with the key, Wull, the warder, opened the door straightway; and, leaving him to watch outside, Lady Elinore went into the dolorous place alone.

No moon could ever shine into dungeon such as this, but by the light of the warder's torch, which gleamed beneath the door, she spied the red-haired lad wrapped in his scarlet cloak, lying face downwards on the earthen floor.

So light of step was Lady Elinore that the lad knew naught of her coming till, with a touch upon his shoulder, she aroused him.

"Drink," said she, setting the pitcher of milk beside him; and putting the cake into his hand, she bade him eat. "For," said she, "thou wilt have need of all thy strength this night."

The lad did her bidding, staring the while as if an angel stood before him, but he spoke no word till the lady asked:

"If thou wert free, could'st find thy homeward way?" Then his tongue loosed.

"Aye, eastward, by the wood and hill," he cried. "The very stars would show my path if I were free."

The last words faltered on his tongue, and noting this the maid hastened her errand.

"Hold fast to hope and follow me," she bade; and turning to the dungeon's eastern wall, she chanted a rude rhyme that had been whispered down through

thrice a hundred years to sons and daughters of the Baron's line:

> "Three stones from the door,
> Three stones from the floor,"

said she, counting the stones of the wall as she went.

> "Three stones to the right,
> And one stone more."

In the dimness of the cell, the firm-set blocks of stone all looked alike to the lad. Small chance there seemed to escape the dungeon's fastness.

Yet when the maid had reached the last stone of her count, she bade him push against it. And lo! the stone, yielding to his hand, swung backward from its place, disclosing to the lad's astonished eyes a passage, at the end of which a faint light shone.

The lad stood spellbound as if he saw the open door of home. And warning him to put the stone in place when he was safely out, and whispering, "God speed thee," Lady Elinore slipped away.

What the lad did when he was left alone you can well guess; and it needs no telling here.

But Lady Elinore did not sleep that night. The tiring-woman coming at the dawn found her awake and shivering though she was wrapped in cloak of fur. With face as white as the night's moon, she sat, listening to every sound. The creaking of a casement startled her, the baying of a hound set her a-trembling.

Nor was it long before the noise of trouble reached her ears, the crying of women, and muttering of men,

and above all the Baron's voice like the boom of thunder. Lady Elinore bade the tiring-woman go and ask what was abroad.

"Alack and alas!" cried the tiring-woman, returning in dismay. "The dungeon key which lay beneath my lord's own pillow hath been stolen while he slept. Some say there's witchcraft in it. An owl hooted in the crooked oak last night and a black cat cried at the postern gate. And the key is gone. My lord's wrath rageth like a fire because of it."

There was no noise in the castle now. A silence like that which comes before a storm filled the whole place. Then as Lady Elinore strained her ears to hear, she caught sound of voices grave and deep that rose and fell upon the air.

"Go yet again, good Nan," she begged, "and bring the news."

The tiring-woman was long upon the errand, and when she came her cheeks were blanched.

"Alas!" she cried. "The armorer hath opened the dungeon door and the cell is empty as a sieve. There's magic in it, else how could a lad have gone through doors and halls and gates unseen; or any stolen the key away from my lord's pillow? But be that as it may, poor Wull must die in the lad's stead; although he calls the saints to witness that he never left his post."

And now a strange thing came about, for though till this time Lady Elinore had sat in terror, all trembling left her at the tiring-woman's news; and, bidding Nan to follow her, she hastened to the Baron's judgment

hall as calm and as fearless as ever she had gone to feast or festival.

There was anger in the judgment hall that morn, and fear and black despair, but no sooner had Lady Elinore crossed its threshold than the castle folk began to hope. "If any can wring mercy from our lord, 'tis she," they whispered. Even poor Wull took heart again, and reading her gratitude in his lady's eyes, he was right glad that he had not told her part in the escape, though his faithfulness was like to cost his life.

But the Baron, deeming that she had come to plead for Wull, met her with frowning brow.

"Ask thou no mercy here," he said, "for by my troth, he who let slip my enemy shall die the death."

"Then must I die," cried Lady Elinore, and bringing forth the key which she had hidden in her dress till now, she told her tale with an unfaltering voice.

She was so young and fair and tender-hearted that the fiercest henchman pitied her, and the sobbing of the women filled the hall.

But the Baron had neither tears nor pity. 'Tis true he dared not take her life, for she was daughter of his father's house and king's ward, too. But what he could do that he would; and, opening wide the castle doors, he drove her forth.

"A hut to cover thy faithless head, a beggar's loaf each day from the castle dole, and a bed of straw on which to lie;—these shalt thou have and nothing more. And he who doth befriend or succor thee," he said, "or he who doth thee harm, shall answer me alike."

THE GUESTS DISCUSS THE TALE

The Aunt must pause ere she could more narrate
Of this sweet lady and her piteous fate.
And from the Younger Sister came a sigh—
Almost a sob,—as she cried out, "Oh, why
Doth not the Red Lad come again to see
How fared the Lady who had set him free?"

"If I were she," out spoke the Eton Lad,
Whose boyish heart more angry was than sad,
"A band of folk to fight for me I'd raise
To kill that Baron for his cruel ways."

The Justice then: "None but the King hath right
King's ward to punish. But mayhap his might
In men and arms could not this Baron quell;
Or, here's the point: how could the Lady tell
Her wrongs unto the King, ev'n if she would?"

"That Wull the Warder had stout heart and good,"
Quoth Squire. "I'll warrant he thro' thick and thin,
Would trusty messenger for her have been."

"Tell us but this thing for our hearts' relief,"
The Squire's Lady said. "Of cold and grief
The sweet maid did not die while there alone?"
The Aunt replied, "Ye shall know all anon."

And when the Squire had stirred to hotter flame
The smoldering logs, and silent all became,
The Aunt took up the broken narrative,—
Her hearers ready breathless heed to give.

WHAT BEFELL THE LADY ELINORE

(Part Two)

The hut that sheltered Lady Elinore stood in the loneliest spot of a great forest. Except for the henchmen who brought the promised loaf of bread each day, she saw no human being.

The snow was white on the ground, the leaves hung dry and brown upon the trees, the little brook that passed the hut was frozen over, and the song birds all were gone. Winter and silence were everywhere.

Nor was loneliness the worst that Lady Elinore had to bear. In the castle every hour had been full. If she grew tired of playing on her lute, there was her tapestry on which to work, or she might sit and spin, chatting to Nan the while; and always there were poor to feed and tend. But here when she had broken the ice in the brook for water, and gathered fagots for her fire, there was naught else to do. She was too sad to sing; she dared not wander in the woods; all day she sat and thought, and thinking made her weep.

Yet though she was so lonely that she could not have been lonelier, and so sad that happiness seemed lost forever, she did not grieve for the deed that she had done. If she had the choice again, she would save the lad.

Day after day went by, each one so like the one it

followed that Lady Elinore's hope of better things was almost gone.

But one night as she sat by her lonely hearth she heard something fall against her door.

"'Tis a dead branch that the wind has blown," thought she; but when she opened the door, she spied at the threshold a dove whose half-frozen wings could carry it no farther.

It lay as still and stark as if all life were gone; yet as the maid bore it to the fire's warmth, she felt its heart beat feebly; and her own heart leaped for joy.

If she could keep the dove to live with her, how happy she would be! Black bread and water from the brook would seem a feast if she might share it with another, and the bare hut a home if it held two.

All night long she kept the dove in her bosom, soothing and caressing it, and calling it by every tender name she knew. And the morning light was scarcely come when she was up to stir the embers of her fire into a blaze, and scatter crumbs for her dear visitor.

But no sooner had she loosed it from her hand than the dove flew hither and thither about the hut seeking a way out.

"Nay, pretty one, I will not let thee go," said Lady Elinore. "Outside are winter and rough winds, and here are warmth and food;" but the dove was not content.

"Stay, little one, I prithee stay," begged Lady Elinore; but coaxing word and tempting crumb were both in vain. The dove beat its wings against the door.

"Perchance its mate watches for it to come," said Lady Elinore; and opening the door she let it fly, though her heart ached and her eyes were dim with tears as it went from sight.

Never had the hut seemed so empty as now, nor the silence in the forest so great, nor the Baron's wrath so hard to bear.

When the henchman came to bring the bread that day she could not keep a question back:

"What of my lord? Sends he no word to me?"

The henchman was a stranger, not long come to the Baron's service; and a stupid fellow at the best.

"I only know to bring thy bread," said he, and he went his way without a backward glance.

He was scarce out of sight when Lady Elinore made haste to wrap her cloak about her.

"I will stay here prisoner no more," cried she, and leaving the door of the hut open she went into the forest; though whither she would fare she did not know.

She saw no path nor road to follow, but wandering here and there she came to a narrow space between the trees, through which she saw white fields beyond the forest's edge, and amid the fields a cluster of poor huts.

Soft curls of faint blue smoke floated above the black thatched roofs, telling as plain as words that in each hut were folk, good dames and gaffers and perhaps a brood of children.

"They will take me in," thought Lady Elinore joyfully; "for to the poor and sad, none are so kind and generous as the poor." She was hastening on with

eager feet, to knock at the first door when, as suddenly as lightning flashes from a cloud, the Baron's parting words leaped to her mind:

"He who doth befriend or succor thee or he who doth thee harm shall answer me alike."

Alas! her knock would be like doomster's fist upon a door. To give a crust to her might cost a blazing roof. To take her in meant ruin if it were known. Yet in her heart Lady Elinore did not doubt that if she knocked she would find friends. Just as Wull of Ettrick's Dale had shielded her, so would these humble folk if she should ask.

"I will not knock and I will not ask," said she, "but if any come from out the huts, then will I beckon him; for if I have not news of home this day, I cannot live." And she waited among the trees with her eyes upon the huts.

She had not waited long when the door of the first hut opened and a young girl came in view. She walked with a springing step, and her long braids of flaxen hair swung to and fro as she went. No sooner had Lady Elinore laid eyes upon her than she knew her.

"It is Joan, the goose-girl," she cried out; but she did not beckon her nor call her.

"She is her mother's only child," she thought; "and who knows but some one might spy her talking to me even here, and tell it to her harm;" and the goose-girl went into the house again, and never dreamed that Lady Elinore was near.

Presently the door of the second hut flew open and a lank brown man strode forth with axe in hand.

"Mark, the woodman!" thought Lady Elinore. "I'll speak with him—but no, he hath too many children to take the risk;" and though the woodman passed so close she might have touched him with her hand, she hid behind a tree and let him go.

And now there came from the third hut the oldest crone that ever lady looked upon. Her trembling knees threatened to fail at every step, her back was bent bow shape, and her withered hands could hardly hold the staff on which she leaned.

"God spare the old from harm," said the gentle lady; and turning where she stood, she followed her own footprints through the snow back to her lonely hut.

The door was still open wide; the wind had scattered straw from the rude bed about the floor; and the fire had sunk to smouldering ashes on the hearth.

Looking into the cheerless place, Lady Elinore was loth to enter, but as she stood, weary and sad, upon the threshold, something rose with fluttering wings to meet her. The dove had come again for shelter, and as it circled round her head, the maid forgot both woe and weariness.

From this time on, the dove lived in the hut, taking flight at its pleasure, but learning soon to come at Lady Elinore's call. Now it would light upon her shoulder, now feed from her hand. And there was much talk between the lady and the dove.

"I wonder what new tale the tiring-woman hath

from Wat, the armorer. Thinkest thou, sweet dove, they talk of me?" asked Lady Elinore.

"Coo-coo," said the dove.

"The Red Lad was so young I could not let him die," said Lady Elinore. "'Tis good to be alive, is it not, dear dove?"

"Coo-coo," answered the dove.

Lady Elinore could but laugh at the dove's pretty ways. And from laughter she soon went to singing.

It was not long before she lilted as gaily as a silver-throated linnet all the day. Only when she sang her May-song, she fell to weeping because of her brother.

All this while the Baron's heart was filled with bitterness.

Because he was angry with his sister who loved him, he was angry with all else. Every day he grew harder and more cruel. Even his companions-at-arms shunned him, and enemies gathered against him abroad and at home.

One night there came to speak with Lady Elinore a motley throng of men, serfs whose backs had felt the Baron's yoke, beggars to whom he had begrudged his meagre alms, freemen whom he had robbed; and henchmen, two or three, who had grown tired of evil-doing.

Some of their faces were wan and pinched, and some were old; but it was a fierce crowd that the maid looked out upon; one not easily to be dealt with were it roused; and who should the leader be but that

same Wull of Ettrick's Dale whom Lady Elinore had saved not once but twice.

"Here be we," quoth Wull. "Threescore good men and true, to pledge our faith to thee and at thy word to put the Baron down."

"Aye, aye," echoed the others eagerly.

There was not one of them who did not owe some kindness to his lady; and in their new-found boldness they could scarcely wait to strike a blow for her.

But Lady Elinore cried out:

"What! Would ye slay your rightful lord? Go quickly each one to his home lest harm befall ye, and wait God's time to right all wrong."

She spoke with authority; and because of this, and not less because, as she stood there with her dove upon her shoulder, she seemed like holy saint to them, they yielded to her word.

"If she says not, I will not," said a serf.

"Aye, it is foolish striving 'gainst our lord. I said it from the start," another spoke.

"If the Baron hear of this, our backs shall know it," cried a third; and their courage going with their purpose, they scuttled off like rabbits through the woods.

Another time a messenger from the King came to the hut in the forest, seeking the truth of rumors that had reached the court about the Lady Elinore and her plight; for the King longed for cause to ride against the Baron who had grown too great for safety.

"Come thou to court," said the messenger to Lady

Elinore; "and tell thy grievance to the King. He'll do thee justice."

But Lady Elinore would not make complaint against the Baron.

"The King would know the truth," said she, "and this is it: I love my brother. And I shall bide at home till he himself ride with me to the King."

The messenger was forced to bear this message to the King or none at all. But he took with it such report of gentle Lady Elinore and her white dove, that all the gallants of the court would fain go on pilgrimage to see the maid;—and would have gone, 'tis said, had they not feared the Baron.

The Baron knew naught of the King's message, nor his sister's answer. If he thought of her, he spoke no word of it to any soul, but went his way with gloomy brow, waging war against his enemies by day and night.

Fight as he would, they gained upon him. If his men brought their own banner safe home these days, they had done well.

At last there came an hour when they were scattered far and wide in flight, and the Baron himself was hard put to it to escape his foes.

Wounded, alone and on foot, he reached the forest beyond which his castle stood; and even there he heard his pursuers close upon his heels.

Winter had passed, and the forest was filled with the bloom of spring that day. The Baron's tired feet stumbled among foxgloves and harebells as he went.

A little brook that danced and glanced in the sunlight dazzled his eyes. Birds chattered and chirped and trilled on every side, and high above all like the lilt of a silver-throated linnet, he heard a voice that he knew, singing a song that he knew:

"Cowslip and cuckoo-bud,
Purple bloom of heather;
Hawthorn and eglantine,—
And thou and I together.

"Eyebright and meadow-rue,
Bell-flower lightly swaying,—
Choose thou for me, and I for thee,
When we are out a-Maying."

All the bitterness and anger that he had cherished so long vanished from the Baron's heart as he listened; and, crying, "Elinore! Elinore! Elinore!" he hastened on, till through a mist of green and gold, he saw his sister standing in the sun with her dove upon her shoulder.

"The foe cometh! Save thyself!" he called with his last strength; and his wounds breaking forth afresh with his effort, he sank fainting to the ground.

There was not time to hide him, nor bind his wounds, for already the sound of horses' hoofs beat on the air; but one thing Lady Elinore could do. Her brother had come back to her, and stay with him she would, though foes were thick as leaves upon the trees. And if she could not win him free, she could perish with him.

She did not know what foes rode here, nor whence

they came, but as she watched with eager eyes she spied amid the trees' young green, a gay fluttering thing as bright as the flame of a Christmas fire; and as her heart leaped to her throat at sight of it, the foremost rider dashed from out the wood, his scarlet mantle blowing in the wind and his ruddy hair bare to the sun.

"The red-haired lad!" cried Lady Elinore.

"The lady of the dungeon!" cried the Red Lad, stopping his plunging steed; and the lad and lady stared each at the other, wonderstruck and speechless.

Lady Elinore was the first to find her voice, and dropping on her knees she cried:

"A boon! A boon!"

The Red Lad's answer came in such a flood of words that the men-at-arms who followed him listened amazed.

"Ask what thou wilt," he cried. "My father's lands are wide and rich. My lady-mother hath both gold and gems and I am heir to all. Speak but thy wish, and thou shalt see what grateful hearts are ours."

"Then of thy goodness spare to me my brother, the Baron, who lieth here at thy mercy," said Lady Elinore; and because of the greatness of her boon she bowed her face upon her hands.

"Coo-coo," called the dove, circling about her head; but there was no other answer to her plea. She heard the shuffling of horses' feet and the jangling of harness; and then came quiet. But Lady Elinore waited

patiently. "He is fighting his hate," thought she. And again, "He is not used to forgiveness and 'tis hard." And at last—"I must plead once more. I did not win *his* life with but a single trial," thought she.

But when she lifted up her head to ask her boon again, the red-haired lad, with all his men, had gone. Only a flicker of his mantle showed where he went through the forest's green.

Then Lady Elinore joyfully summoned Woodman Mark, and Wat, the armorer, to bear the Baron to the castle where he lay sick-abed for many a month.

Lady Elinore tended him both night and day, bribing him with honey spoon to drink her bitter brewings and singing him full many a song.

His greatest pleasure was to watch her with her dove; and when, with health restored, he rode into the world again, his banner bore a new device—a snow-white dove—against its somber field, in honor of the gentle sister whom he loved.

In these days, there was naught that Lady Elinore might not have from him for the asking; and it is said that, guided by her wisdom and her mercy, the Baron thenceforth ruled his land right well and made a glad peace with his enemies.

When the next Yuletide came, he went with all his men in holiday attire to the King's Court; and by his side, with shining eyes and glowing cheeks, rode happy Lady Elinore.

Ninth Night

THE SCHOLAR'S LETTER

Again the day with its sports was done
And the Guests awaited the evening's fun;
The candles flamed and the Yule Log glowed;
When came a clattering on the road,
Of horses' hoofs; and the Guests cried "Hark!
Who rides so fast in the cold and dark?"
"A Guest?" "A Stranger?" "Ill news,
mayhap——"
The clatter ceased; a resounding rap,
A blast of cold from the opened door,—
Behold, the Postboy! His stiff hands bore
The bulky letter he'd brought the Squire,
Who paid a shilling, the Postboy's hire,
And ordered for him a Christmas dole
From Yuletide cake and from wassail bowl.

The letter fingered and scanned must be
Till cried the Squire, "Now, I'll warrant ye,
That trader's writ me about my wool,—
Of price and market his head is full!"
But when was broken the blotch of red
That sealed the letter, the good Squire said,
"What! Can it be 'tis from that pale youth
Our Scholar friend? Aye, 'tis so, in truth.
I mind him well, with his sober look
And nose forever stuck into a book.
But as we journeyed with him we found
His heart as kind as his wit was sound."

"We know! We know!" came the eager cry
From those who'd been of that company,—
The Joyous Trav'lers,—in Maymonth past;
"What writes he?" "Where has his lot been
cast?"

"We soon shall know what he's been about,"
Said the Squire, and smoothing the thin sheets
out,
Read: that the Scholar would fain greet all
Who might remember him at the Hall;
That though he wandered in foreign parts,
Yet mindful was he of English hearts
And English homes, at this season dear;
And since he could not himself appear
As Joyous Guest of the gen'rous Squire
And tell a tale by the Yuletide fire,
He'd sent a ballad that, by their grace,
When tales were told, might be granted place.

At letter's ending, the Scholar sent
Respect and duteous compliment;
And called down blessings in stately phrase
On Squire and Lady for all their days.
Quoth Squire, "How strange that the Scholar's
rhyme
Should come to hand in the nick of time.
Read out at once shall the ballad be
By Cousin—wonted to script is he."

THE GOLDEN GALLEON

All day, between the blue of heaven
  And blue of billowy sea,
Had sped the Golden Galleon
  Like live thing strong and free;

But saffron sail from gilded mast
  Hung limp and empty now;
The shining ship at anchor lay
  With idly-dipping prow.

No bigger ship the waters knew,
  None beautiful as she;
Like golden sunbeam bright and swift
  She flashed from sea to sea.

Her captain (braver ne'er put forth),
  Was Goncibella bold,
Where none before had dared to sail,
  He steered his ship of gold.

A mighty warrior, too, was he;
  Against his country's foes
Oft had he been her shield, her sword,
  Their onslaughts to oppose.

Aye, such he had been, times untold,
  And in those vanished days,
His country's savior he was called,
  Her hero beyond praise.

O that loved country! How it since
  Had scorned and flouted him!
E'en stripped him of his rank and power,
  At some rich tyrant's whim.

That fickle-hearted, thankless land
  He never would serve more.
Left to her cowardly, false knaves
  Ill would she fare in war!

But he in his bright ship would sail
  To some far fairy spot
Where all his hurts and wrongs and loves
  Might be in time forgot.

Or stay! Since he had found men false
  And law a flimsy thing,
Why should not he, in scorn of all,
  Become a Pirate King?—

Pirate so fierce and pitiless
  That men quailed at his name.
His shining ship as dread a thing
  To meet as raging flame.

When wrecks of ships he had despoiled
  Drifted in every sea;
When loaded was his galleon
  With gold, got cruelly.

Then to his land would he return,
  To wreak a vengeance dire;
"Eat now your slighting words, base folk!
  Cringe ye, before my ire!"

Thus dark and evil were his thoughts,
  As he strode o'er the deck,
When lo! What caught his roving glance?
  What was that nearing speck?

A little craft? Aye, that it was.
  With its brave bit of sail
It tossed there, on the open sea,
  Like sea-shell, light and frail.

From its low prow, that banner waved
  'Neath which he oft had fought.
"No flag, no country, now have I,"
  Stern Goncibella thought.

The little ship drew near apace,
  Hands signaled as it came.
What was the shouting? Could it be
  The voices called his name?

His name indeed; and when the bark
Had reached the galleon's side,
"Help, Goncibella! Help, we crave!"
Imploringly they cried.

"The foe has waked! His sails are set!
He threatens our dear land.
What hope have we? What chance, save one,
His power to withstand?

"Thou art that hope, that chance; O help
Thy country in her need!
The Council bade us beg thee come.
Beg,—yea, to pray, to plead."

"Ha, ha! Who triumphs now?" he thought.
"Revenge both quick and sweet
Is in my grasp. Come they to me
To save them from defeat?

"Am I a weather-vane to turn
Swift, at the Council's breath?
Nay, let them meet their doom, say I,
And may the foe deal death!"

At his black looks, the envoys shrank;
(They saw again the place
Where jeering throngs had loaded him
With insult and disgrace,)

Yet plead they must. "O save thy land!
  Else shall it ruined be.
O Goncibella! Haste thee home!
  Thy country calls for thee!"

In fear they waited. Pictured he
  That scene of shame and scorn?
Nay, nay! Beyond the waves, he saw
  The house where he was born.

The flower-decked hills, the marble pomp
  Of palace and of tower.
Grand city walls, gates richly wrought,—
  What! Should a hostile power,

A wanton foe destroy this place,
  Or conquer and possess?
A hundred saints forbid! His heart
  Had lost all bitterness.

"O haste, my men! Spread every sail,
  Quick! Quick! let us be gone!
My country calls nor calls in vain
  On me, her loyal son."

Then like a shaft of light sent forth
  From out the golden west
The Golden Galleon sped on
  At her brave lord's behest.

And when the gallant ship had reached
  His country's threatened shore,
And folk knew their brave leader come
  To their defense once more,

Up flamed their hope and courage then,
  Wild terror struck the foe;
And short and sharp the fight that forced
  The hostile ships to go.

Aye, vanquished and in panic dire
  The foe fled swift away.
And Goncibella saved again
  His land that fateful day.

Better than self his land he loved
  With love that sprang anew
When came her call. O blest the land
  That hath such patriots true!

Tenth Night

THE SNOWFALL

GRIM Winter now with lavish hand
Sent drifting snow upon the land.
So soft, so white beyond compare,
And floating noiseless on the air,
A wonder-thing it seemed to all,
The children joyed to see it fall.
All day the snow was whirled and tossed,
Till drifts piled high, and paths were lost;
And anxious shepherds braved the cold,
To bring bewildered sheep to fold.

At dusk, the Squire's Head Shepherd came;
So white the cloak that wrapped his frame,
So frosted his rough hair and beard,
That he a man of snow appeared.
He came to tell the Squire that warm
And safe his flocks were from the storm.

A weather-beaten man and rude,
With furrowed face, yet having shrewd
Keen look within his deep-set eyes.
Betokening that he was wise
(As truth he was) in judging folk
As well as sheep. And oft he spoke
With wit sharp as the stinging sleet

That shepherds on the moorlands meet.
He knew his place and kept it, yet
All unabashed, his betters met.
In grand or simple company
Or poor or rich, himself was he.

His tidings told, he would away
But that the good Squire bade him stay,
For rest and warmth; and from his store
Of new or ancient shepherd lore
To tell such tale, wise, witty, plain
As might the Guests best entertain.

The Shepherd then with courtesy true,
His forelock touched as meet and due;
The seat the Squire assigned him, took,
Clasped his big hands upon his crook,
And said, " I'll tell ye how it went
When Hodge lacked summat of his rent."

THE SIXTEENTH EGG

Once on a time a goodman whose name was Hodge rented a field and a farmstead from his lord. And the rent that he paid was this: one pound, one sixpence, one hen, and sixteen eggs.

Come Martinmas morn, be it foul or fair, Hodge, the goodman, was the first to lay down the rent for the steward,—pound, sixpence, hen and eggs all told, till at last when folks would make a certainty the saying was, "As sure as Hodge's rent."

Hodge lived and died and his son, young Hodge, took his place, ploughing and planting the same field and paying the same rent, though to a different steward; and what folks said in his father's day, they said in his, "As sure as Hodge's rent."

Martinmas days came and Martinmas days went and young Hodge grew to be old Hodge. Nor was it long before he went the way all must go; and the farmstead and field, the paying of the rent, and the pride in what folks said of it, passed on to Hodge, *his* son.

The young man felt his accountability beyond ordinary. "But what my father and my gran'ther did, I shall do," said he; and no man was before him at the steward's.

But there's no foreseeing what will happen in a world so full of haps and mishaps; and a Martinmas

day came round when Hodge had but fifteen eggs in the basket where sixteen should be; and every hen's nest in the steading empty!

"Woe's me!" cried Hodge. "That the lack of an egg should take away the good name that my father and my gran'ther left. And how can I face the steward with the rent short?"

"Hoot-toot!" said his wife, who was a bustling body. "It would be a hard matter if the steward would not forgive ye an egg after this many a year of honest dealing. Get ye up and on your way."

All she said was but cold comfort to poor Hodge.

"'As sure as Hodge's rent' will ne'er be said again," he groaned. "And my father and my gran'ther in their graves!"

"Where else should they be?" cried the goodwife, "and they dead so long? But have done with your groaning and I'll just be sending Jenny, the wean, to her granny's to beg an egg to complete the count. We've done as much and more for Granny;" and she called the lassie, and bade her go.

"Be sure you haste on the way and back, unless ye would have all the bairnies crying after ye that your father was late with his rent," said she.

The lassie was away like a bird, and long before they looked to see her, Hodge and his wife spied her hastening home with an egg in her hand.

And Hodge, the goodman, was mightily cheered by the sight.

"'Tis ill breaking old customs," said he. "My fa-

ther before me and his father before him paid pound, pence, hen and eggs when pound, pence, hen and eggs were due. And as they did, so will I." He was just raising his voice to bid the child be cautious when her foot struck a clod of earth, and down she came.

Aye, and down came the egg that was to have saved all! The king himself, as the saying is, could not have put it together again.

"It was my granny's last egg and she bade me go slow and be careful, and ye bade me haste; and I do not want the bairnies to cry after me that my father was late with his rent," sobbed the wean.

"Hoot-toot!" said the mother. "There's other eggs in the world, I'll warrant ye. And I'll be stepping to Dame Trotter's to borrow one till the morrow's morn."

"'Tis ill paying rent with other folk's eggs, be they begged or borrowed," said poor Hodge; but the goodwife was off and away ere the words were out of his mouth, and there was naught to do but to wait for her to come again.

And much as he had to say against borrowing, Hodge was fairly cast down when his dame was back and brought no egg.

"Other folks must pay rent as well as we," she said; "and every egg Dame Trotter had was packed and ready for the steward. And what think ye I heard her say to her goodman as I came up? 'Simpkin,' said she, 'be at your dressing and ye may beat Hodge to the steward's yet and win a saying for *your*

bairns.' But Simpkin was in no haste and I mistrust me he had not all the silver. Eggs are good but silver is better with the steward, I'll warrant ye," said Hodge's wife.

"Alack," said poor Hodge, fetching a heavy sigh. "Another will go before me and another. 'Tis well that my father and my gran'ther did not live to see this day," said he.

"Hoot-toot! with your father and your gran'ther!" cried the goodwife. "To my mind they've naught to do with it. Bestir yourself and trudge to Neighbor Mark."

"I'll have naught to do with borrowing," said Hodge. "There's no luck in it."

"But there's luck in trading," quoth his dame. "Find out your neighbor's lack and make exchange. Your father and your gran'ther, too, would tell ye that," said she; and, taking Hodge by the shoulders, she fairly pushed him on his way.

Nor had he gone far when whom should he meet but Neighbor Mark.

"Neighbor Mark," said Hodge, "lack ye aught?"

"Aye, that I do," said Neighbor Mark.

"Have I it?" asked poor Hodge.

"How do I know?" said Neighbor Mark.

"Ye would know soon if ye asked me," said Hodge.

"Well then," said Neighbor Mark, "I lack eggs. I'd even the thought of beating ye to the steward's with the rent this morn, but here I be waiting for hens to lay. Two are on the nest and one is going, and the

weans are all watching. But 'tis hard for a man to wait on hens, is it not, Hodge?" said he.

"It is," said Hodge, "but I've no egg;" and bidding Neighbor Mark good day, he went home sorrowful.

"'Tis no use to try," said he. "The luck has gone from Hodge's house, and I mistrust me it will never come again."

"Hoot-toot!" said the goodwife. "'Tis better to try than to cry, say I. And while ye were at your clavers with Neighbor Mark, who should come begging a bit of bonny-clabber but Goody Green? Praise be, there are eggs and to spare at her house! Three of them lying there useless, as it were. It is true that Kate, her kitchen lass, had a mind to stir them into a pudding, but we'll not leave her time for that. Here's the silver, and here's the eggs in one basket, and the brown hen in a basket, too, to please Jenny, poor wean. And here's Goody Green with a bowl of bonny-clabber, and here am I to keep ye company to the castle—for that two make better time than one, everybody knows. Simpkin will have no breath to spare if he gets to the steward before we do."

Hodge was on the way almost before he knew it, and in spite of all the good dames had to say to one another—and their tongues were never still—the three of them made such speed that they were soon in sight of Goody's cot.

The door was wide open, and as they came up, they could spy Kate, the lass, stirring about her work.

Kate was a bonny lass and a thrifty lass and a busy lass. And as for a Martinmas pudding, none could make a better one than Kate.

"One egg for Goody Green, one egg for me," quoth she, breaking an egg into the bowl at every count, "and one egg ——"

"Wait, hinny, wait!" cried Goody Green, running in at the door.

"Stop, Kate!" called Hodge's wife, who was close upon Goody's heels.

"Prithee, good lass," gasped poor Hodge.

But with all their haste and their cries, they were too late. The last egg went into the bowl for luck, and Hodge, poor man, had none.

"There," said he, "did I not tell ye? I have not the rent, and I shall not have it."

"But one pound, one sixpence, a hen and *fifteen* eggs *is* rent; and ye'll get there with it first, just as your father and your gran'ther and for all I know, your gran'ther's gran'ther did, if only ye'll put wits into your feet," quoth Wife.

And what with hastening and running and puffing and blowing and going in by-paths and climbing o'er stiles, and pushing through hedges and bushes and brambles, the good dame and Hodge were the first in the castle hall after the great door was open and the steward had sat down in his place.

"'As sure as Hodge's rent.' 'Tis a good saying," quoth the steward.

"It was," groaned Hodge; and he would have been

out with the whole tale had it not been for the goodwife.

"Aye, sir," said she, dropping a curtsy as she spoke; "and 'tis a good friend ye have been to us. Many's the time I have said to Hodge, 'The steward is our friend.' And we have brought the silver. Here it is, hard earned, hard saved. One pound and a sixpence. The bairns have rubbed the sixpence till it shines. And here's the hen—a bonny brown hen. Our Jenny—she's our youngest—could not bear for the brown hen to go with her legs tied and her head hanging down like any common fowl. 'Mammy,' said she, 'let her go in a basket.' So she sits in a basket like a queen.

"Lift the lid a bit, Hodge," said the goodwife, "that the steward may see the brown hen."

"Yes, alack!" said poor Hodge, and he was just lifting the lid when—hey day! up flew the brown hen in a flurry.

"Cut, cut, cah-dah-cut!" she called as saucy and as free as if she were in Hodge's barnyard instead of a lord's castle. "Cut, cut, cah-dah-cut!"

And there in the bottom of the basket, what should Hodge and his good dame spy but an egg as white as milk and as fine as silk!

"'Tis a grand hen that we have brought ye, as ye shall see when Hodge has caught her," said Hodge's wife. "And *sixteen* eggs!"

"Aye," said Hodge, coming up a bit out of breath but with the brown hen in his arms; "the whole rent,

pound, pence, hen and eggs, paid on time just as my father and my gran'ther paid," said he.

And having finished his business, he gave place at the steward's table for Simpkin, who was just coming in at the door.

THE NURSE CALLS THE CHILDREN TO BED

Who now was seen to take her stand
At top of stair, with lifted hand
And warning finger, but that dame
Whose word oft ended laugh and game?

Firmly she spoke. "'Tis time," she said,
"High time the children were in bed;
And ladies, too, although I may
Be chid if I thus say my say.
But all young maids who are asleep
Before the clock strikes twelve, will keep
Their rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes,
While Late-to bed and Late-to rise
Will wax so pale and dull, I ween
That none will choose her as May Queen.

Howe'er, that's as the ladies will.
I've warned them and henceforth keep still.
But come, sweet babes, up with ye now.
Who loiters will dream dreams, I trow,
Such dreams—Nay, nay! Of them, less said
The better. Haste ye, though, to bed."

"Oh, Nurse! Good Nurse! 'Tis not yet late,"
The children cried. "Pray let us wait."
And the small lad who knew her best
Stood forth to bargain for the rest.

"Tell us a tale and we will go."
"Nay—bed." "Nay, first a tale!" And so
The playful bickering went on,
Until the Squire's Little Son,—
His arms about her,—coaxed. "Nurse dear,
Such tales as yours we never hear
From any else; so say not nay!"
And by his soft words, won the day.

THE LUCKY-STONE

Once upon a time a lad found a lucky-stone lying in a road. And did he know what it was? He did, and a proud lad he was at his find. And how did he know? Because it had a band of white running around it, just as every lucky-stone hath had since the world began.

"My fortune is as good as made," said he, and putting the stone in his pocket he went off whistling.

It was a summer morn and the lad was bound for a farmer's meadow to make hay. But no sooner had he got the lucky-stone in his pocket than he began to think that of all the days in the year there was no day so good as this one for a holiday.

"A man who carries luck with him has no need to toil," said he, and he sat down under a tree by the road and fell to wondering what like of good fortune the lucky-stone might bring him.

Doubtless he would soon be as rich as the richest man in the village, who was the miller. He had more money than he could count, 'twas said, and to be as rich as he, would suit the lad well.

"Perchance I shall buy the mill," said he to himself; "'tis a fine thing to be a miller, with naught to do but watch the grain run through the hopper."

The sun was high in the sky by this time and the day

was hot and what should the lad do but stretch himself upon the grass beneath the tree and fall to sleep—and to dreaming, too.

Never were such dreams as his! Scarcely were his eyes closed than he found himself mounted upon a milk-white horse and riding away to see the queen. But lo and behold ye! he had not come to the palace door when his grand horse changed to a chariot with four black horses, every one of them prancing and dancing till it was as much as a body could do to hold them in. And there sat the lad in the chariot, with a wallet of gold pieces beside him.

He was fairly sorry when his dreams were over and he awoke to find himself on the grass beneath the tree.

"But I've still the lucky-stone," he said, and he went home well content.

From that time on the lad thought of little else than the fortune that was sure to come. Sometimes he waited for it at home, sometimes he went to meet it on the road, and sometimes he dreamed of it under the tree by the road. And if he went to the farmer's, which was none too often, he talked more of what he would do when he was rich than he raked hay.

At last the farmer would have naught to do with him for a stupid, long-tongued lazy-bones; and neither would other folk. The lad could get nothing to do if he wanted it.

It was not long before he was ragged and hungry. Nor was that the worst of it, for one day when he was walking along, looking for his fortune, he put his hand

in his pocket to feel the lucky-stone. And—do ye believe me?—all that he found there was a hole!

The lucky-stone had fallen from the lad's pocket into the very road where it had been when the lad first laid eyes on it; and there it lay till summer came again.

Then what should happen but that another lad passing that way should spy the lucky-stone. And a proud lad he was to find it, ye may be sure.

"My fortune is as good as made," said he; and putting the stone in his pocket, he went off whistling.

The lad was bound to a farmer's meadow to make hay. And never was better day than this to work, thought he.

"With a lucky-stone in my pocket, I'll rake more hay than the farmer himself," said he; and as he said, he did.

He worked so fast and he worked so well that the farmer had an extra sixpence and a good word for him at the day's end.

"That's luck," said the lad, and he promised himself that he would do as much and more on the morrow as he had done that day; and he kept his promise, too.

The farmer was never done praising him, and other folk took it up, till among them all the lad always had work in plenty and money to save.

First it was a sixpence put away, and then a shilling, and at last it was said that the lad had more money than the richest man in the village, who was the miller.

"Now I will buy the mill," said the lucky lad; "'tis

a fine thing to be a miller with work to do from cock's crow till day's end." And buy the mill he did.

He had not been miller long when the first lad came seeking work, and got it, too, for the young miller had a kind heart as well as riches.

One day as master and man stood together watching the grain run through the hopper, the first lad spoke out:

"Master," said he, "how came ye to your fortune, if ye care to tell?"

"Why, look ye," said the miller, "'tis all because of this;" and putting his hand in his pocket, he drew out the lucky-stone that the first lad had found and lost.

Eleventh Night

THE LULL IN THE WIND

Oo-oo! How the wind blew!
Around the Hall its way it took;
Bang! slammed a door, the windows shook,
Crash! went a dead limb to the ground.
Big branches creaked with doleful sound.

Oo-oo! How the wind blew!
It hurled the dry leaves down in showers;
It roared about the ivied towers,
And through the chimney moaned and whined
And howled like some wild thing confined.

Oo-oo! How the wind blew!
Till suddenly its shrieking cry
Changed to a whisper, then a sigh;
An instant's lull; then fierce and strong
Again the tempest rushed along.
Oo-oo! How the wind blew!

The Guests sat hearkening; and anon
While yet the furious wind blew on,
The Aunt's Scotch Maid on errand came,
Into the Hall to seek that dame.
None heeded, till to their surprise,
They saw her stand with dreamy eyes
As she were rooted to the spot
And Guests, time, place, she had forgot,

As had she; for her thoughts had flown
On the wind's wings unto her own
Dear Scotland where, ev'n as a child,
Well had she loved such tempests wild.

Oft had the wind sung lullaby
To her, and oft on moorlands high
Or rugged hillsides, she had roved
Companioned by the wind she loved.
Oft, too, by cottage fire of peat
(What homely fragrance, smoky heat!)
She had, an awestruck list'ner sat
And heard weird tales and fearsome chat
Such as to mind and tongue will rise
When the wild wind in fury cries.

The Aunt knew this entrancéd mood
Of the Scotch Maid, and understood
How her mind, ever brimming o'er
With her Norse mother's legend-lore,
Would at such times quick overflow
With some brave tale of long ago.

Therefore the Aunt: "Let the Maid stay
And tell a tale, if none gainsay."
Said Squire, "Indeed the Maid shall bide,"
And as the wind's wild roaring died
To sudden lull, her voice alone
The silence filled with chanting tone.
And Guests sat rapt and listening
As the Maid told of child and king.

THE CHILD IN THE KING'S LAP

THERE was a feud between Ivor, the Jarl, and Ivor, the King, in the land of Norroway. And to sorrow and strife there was no end.

Wherever Jarl's men met King's men, there was word for word and blow for blow; and many a one rode forth at morn who came not home at even.

Yet what the quarrel was about, no man could tell. Some said it was the barking of a dog that started all; and some, the killing of a sheep. And some would have it that the Jarl had made a jest too sharp to please the King. But all knew this—'twixt Ivor, the Jarl, and Ivor, the King, there was hatred as hot as fire and as cold as steel. And the feud grew apace.

Sometimes it was the men of the King who rode to harry and destroy the Jarl's people.

Sometimes it was the Jarl at the head of his daring band who carried woe and waste to those who cried skaal to the King.

But always it grew worse and not better between the two, till at last the King vowed by the beard of Thor that ere another summer's sun, no chick should be left to chirp, nor cow to low, nor child to laugh in the land of the Jarl.

News of the King's threat was brought to the Jarl. Perchance it was a bird that told it. Perchance the

wind bore the words. Perchance even in the King's halls the Jarl had those who wished him well and gave him tidings. But be this as it may, one thing was certain—what the King said the Jarl heard.

And it so happened that as he listened to the threat, the laughter of a child filled his house,—the laughter of his little son.

In all Norroway there was no child so straight of limb and clear of eye as the Jarl's little son. And none was merrier than he. Now he would beat upon a shield with sturdy fists; now he must have the Jarl's sheathed sword on which to ride; or yet again, on upturned bench he sailed away, a Viking bold to conquer unknown seas.

Already there was a saying among the humbler folk, "Greater than Jarl or King shall Jarl's son be." And the Jarl believed the saying.

Therefore when the King's threat was told, the Jarl was moved by a mighty wrath.

"I will carry destruction to him ere he bring it to me!" he cried; "and it is he who shall beg of my mercy."

Yet even as he spoke a fear beset him. If some untoward chance should give the King the mastery, if some bold traitor crept within the Jarl's own halls, if he, the Jarl, should fall in battle, then what of the child?

His fears weighing heavily upon him, he bade his trustiest and strongest men to convey the child to his mother's kinsmen, there to bide beyond the King's

reach, until such time when the Jarl should overthrow the King. And the men went forth that very hour.

Jarl Ivor's little son was nothing loth to travel. The crackling of the snow, the sparkling of the Northern lights in the sky, the sound of the surging sea on the shore below the cliff, all pleased him as, perched upon the back of Ole's son, he journeyed through the night.

The King's road ran by the shore and the Jarl's road by the cliff, but the men went warily. There was little talk among them. Even the prattling of the child was hushed, lest the foe hear.

"Still tongue makes sure way," said Ole's son; and all went well with them till like a ravening wolf that seeks his prey, a great wind came upon the land.

Never was wind like this wind!

It moaned among the rocks, and shrieked in the treetops. It tore through the fields like a mad huntsman at whose heels there goes a yelping pack of hounds. It hurled itself like a demon foe against castle and hut, and it smote like a whip of a thousand thongs the man or beast that crossed its path.

When the young of that night were old and grey, they remembered the great wind, and many were the tales that were told of it.

But never a stranger tale than this; for when the fury of the first blast died away, and the Jarl's men roused themselves to venture on, behold, neither Jarl's son nor Ole's son was to be seen!

Whether Ole's son, with the child on his back, had

stumbled and fallen from the cliff's edge, or whether the wind in its fierceness had swept the two away, who could tell? The man who had been nearest them knew no more than the one farthest off. But that the child and his bearer had perished none doubted; and, search proving vain, they returned to the Jarl with their evil tidings.

Dead! The laughing child who was to have been so great!

And who was to blame but the King? Was it not he who had vowed to hush the laughter of children? Was it not because of his threatening words that the child had been sent from his play to perish in the storm?

The bench that had served as ship so brief a time before was still upturned. The sheathed sword that had been his steed, lay where he had left it.

"Cast off the sheath and give the naked sword into my hand," cried Ivor, the Jarl. "And let none bid me stay; for the child is dead, and King or Jarl must die!"

But while there was sorrow and anger in the Jarl's house, in the house of the King there was wonder.

The wind still tore at the turrets and cried at the gates, but none heeded it; for a little child was in the King's hall—a little child plucked from the bramble-bushes on a cliff-side by King's men, who had brought him hither.

Nudging and interrupting each other, they told of the rescue.

"We were on the King's road, riding homeward, when I heard him call," said one.

"Nay, it was Arne heard," another cried. "'Tis but a bird,' said he."

"'No bird but child,' quoth I," said he who led the tale. "So up we climbed, I first, and Peter next——"

"Nay, Arne next," cried Arne's friend.

"And there he sat," said Arne, speaking for himself, "caught like a feather in the bush. The winds would yet have snatched him from his perch, I'll warrant ye, had we not come."

"Nay," said the child, "I can hold fast. The wind could not blow me away."

"Just so we found him, the little eagle, holding fast and calling lustily but unafraid," said the first man. "'Whose child, think ye?' asked I."

"And I said 'I'm the Jarl's son,'" piped the child.

King's men though they were, all looked upon the little lad with favor, as, rosy of cheek and bright of hair, unscathed by the storm and undaunted by strangers, he stood in their midst. Aye, in their hearts they wished him well but they dared not show what they felt because of the King.

Had he not vowed that ere another summer's sun no chick should be left to chirp, nor cow to low, nor child to laugh in the land of the Jarl? See how he sat apart to-night with gloomy look, and hand upon his sword. It was an evil chance that cast the little one into his power.

The King's men were afraid of the King, but the Jarl's little son was not afraid.

"My father's sword is as long as thy sword," he cried, drawing nearer the King.

Alas! Alas! Why did he talk of swords! thought the well-wishers, but the King stirred not nor spoke.

"When my father's sword is in the sheath, I play with it. And when I am a man, I shall draw it—so," said the Jarl's little son, throwing out a sturdy arm.

"Does thy little son play with thy sword? Will it be his some day?" he asked the King.

Alas! Alas! The King had no son,—no child to laugh in his lonely house. Nay, more, was it not whispered that 'twas envy of Jarl Ivor with his little son that fanned the feud flames high?

There was none who dared to speak these things in the King's household, but the King knew what the onlookers thought. He remembered his threat: "No chick to chirp and no cow to low and no child to laugh." And a King's word is not to be lightly set aside.

All of this was in his mind as, with his eyes o'ershadowed by his hand, he watched the child.

Some say he smiled beneath his hand, some say he tempted with a dangling jewel, some even say he whispered softly, bidding the child to come; but none were sure of aught but this; in the grave silence, while men watched and feared, the Jarl's son climbed upon the King's knee. And the King forbade him not.

Then of a sudden the silence was filled with a joyous babbling.—Was it not a law in Norroway that a child

whom the King held was King's ward ever after? Nay, not law, but custom old, old as the cliffs.

This man's mother had told him of it, and that man's grandsire. It was in the sagas. Nay, not there, but in a bard's tale: A child in a King's lap King's ward must be. And the Jarl's son was in the King's lap!

"Skaal! Skaal to the King! Skaal to the child in the King's lap!" shouted the King's men, and their voices rang like a peal of happy bells. "Skaal to the King and child!"

The child was still in the King's lap when the Jarl came calling vengeance at the gates.

Nor did the King give up his charge when the Jarl, mazed and bewildered by the news he had heard, stumbled his way into the hall.

The Jarl's men crowding behind him, and the King's men on guard in the King's house, stood awed and trembling as King and Jarl met face to face. But the Jarl's little son knew naught of strife and hatred.

"Father! Father!" he called out gleefully. "The King's sword is as long as thine. I shall have two swords to play with now."

And the tale hath it that when the King gave and the Jarl took the laughing child, the feud ended.

On the morrow's morn, Ole's son was found senseless and broken but not beyond the mending, in a cleft of the cliff where the wind had tossed him. He lived to dance at many a merry-making in a land where peace and plenty were; aye, and to see Jarl's son greater than Jarl or King.

Twelfth Night

TWELFTH-NIGHT REVELS

On Twelfth Night in the green-decked room,
Whence candle-light had chased the gloom,
The genial Squire and Lady good
Amid a strange assemblage stood.
A marvel 'twas that such should come
To any home in Christendom!

Both folk and creatures there appeared;
Among them a huge dragon reared
Its awful head with fearsome roar,
Or snorting, stretched upon the floor
Its hideous scaly length, and trailed
About the Hall; yet no one quailed!

A Hobbyhorse pranced close behind
Of such a comic shape and kind,
As would have made the holiest friar
Or sourest Goody in the shire
Nigh burst with laughter at the steed!
A mighty Champion, (small indeed),
Bestrode the horse, and did proclaim
Himself, St. George,—the very same
Whose name is cried against the foe
When English hosts to battle go.

The strange horse whinnied, shied and balked;
A Turk, gay-turbaned, next him stalked,
Then, King of Misrule. What a King!
A pompous, monstrous, barrel-shaped thing
Who, wearing crown, and swelled with pride
(And pillows!) strutted on beside
His Queen. Her nose of fiery red
Poked out full half-a-yard ahead.

A swarm of folk of every sort
Made up the King of Misrule's Court,
With faces black or ghastly white;
Some were in rags, some richly dight,
(Tho' hindside fore or upside down
Might be the gorgeous cloak or gown!)

The droll, fantastic, capering train
Marched through the Hall and back again
With jovial noise and antics strange;
Then hark! A whistle. Presto! Change!
And, when the masks aside were thrown
These Mummers showed as folk well-known.

The Squire and Lady laughing gazed;
The Hobbyhorse, on hind legs raised,
And grinning wide with roguish joy,
Revealed himself the Eton Boy.
Great England's doughty Champion
St. George,—the Squire's Little Son.
The kitchen boy had chosen to play
The part of Turk in turban gay.

The bulgy King of Misrule,—lo,
'Twas Nurse with jolly face aglow!
The Queen (her pasteboard nose removed)
To be the Older Sister proved.

What merriment, as prying eyes
Looked closer at each droll disguise!
Such madcap fun, such drollery
Could only on a Twelfth Night be.
Breathless at last, with laughter spent,
The Guests dropped to their seats, but meant
To frolic more had they not heard
The Vicar say, "Upon my word,
This is the time to tell about
How mumming with poor Jem turned out."

JEM, THE MUMMER

Said Jem, one merry Twelfth Night,
"A-mumming I will go.
I trow no other villager
Will make so brave a show."

"Then go thy ways," said Goodwife,
"Thy mummer's garb to find;
'Tis just such foolery befits
Thy silly, witless mind."

Thought Jem, "I'll go, nor tell her
What mask and clothes I wear,
When mumming's done, and I come home,—
Eh! but I'll make her stare!"

In truth he looked a monster
When he was full arrayed.
A donkey's head with mouth agape
Was on his head displayed.

Fantastic garb, half goatskin,
Half lamb's-wool wrapped him round
And bells tied all about his knees
Gave forth a jangling sound.

At sight of him the children
  Ran off and hid in fright,
But lads with laughter doubled up
  And maids screamed with delight.

When on the green had gathered
  The jolly mummers all,
With boisterous glee they took their way
  To Castle, Inn and Hall.

With laughing praise, the gentry
  Watched all their antics droll,
'Twas hail and welcome everywhere,
  Plum cake and wassail bowl.

"Ne'er was there jollier frolic!"
  Thought Jem, on homeward way;
"And tip-top mummer wast thou, Jem,
  And well thy part did'st play."

Strutting he reached his cottage.
  Late now the night and dark;
At the strange figure drawing near,
  The dog began to bark.

"Down, Lassie, down! 'Tis Master,"
  Cried Jem, but cried in vain.
The louder he, the louder Lass
  But barked and barked again.

Till Jem must waken Goodwife.
  "What ho! Come, Tib my dear,
Bid Lass be silent. Ope the door,
  It is thy Goodman here."

Cried Tib, "My man? Nay, never
  Barked dog at master so!
Begone, thou thief! The safer thou,
  The sooner thou dost go."

Then, head thrust out of window,
  "Help, neighbors! Help!" she cried.
"What beast is this that on two legs
  Stalks o'er the country side?"

And though Jem roared his loudest,
  None seemed to hear a word;
The affrighted neighbors screamed with Tib,—
  Such noise was never heard.

Then, clatter! Clash! Bang! Clatter!
  Down fell all round about,
A rattling show'r of pots and pans
  That quick put Jem to rout.

Away he ran for dear life,
  Lass barking close behind.
One dog,—another, followed; then
  Came dogs of every kind.

Dogs long-tailed, short-tailed, shaggy,
  Smooth-haired, white, black and brown,
Old dogs and young; till after Jem
  Ran every dog in town.

Jem dashed along, leaped ditches,
  Fell to his knees in mire,
('Twas then a bulldog snapped at him
  And tore his queer attire.)

He dodged, he climbed, he circled,
  Till suddenly right near,
He saw the church, the Parson's house.
  One bound it took to clear

The Parson's wall. Great knocking
  Quick on the door Jem made.
The Parson came with light in hand,
  "Who is it seeks my aid?"

"'Tis Jem, sir, Jem. Your honor
  Knows me; on Sabbath day
The first one in my place at church
  The last to go away.

"Yet something hath bewitched me
  And I am in sad plight;
My own wife knows me not! My dog
  Gives chase to me to-night."

"Then why not," asked the Parson,
"Take off that donkey's head?"
Up went Jem's hands. "I never thought
Of that," he slowly said.

"No wonder 'tis the people
All call our Parson wise.
He knows just what will set me right
In Tib's and Lassie's eyes.

"Belike I'd best unfasten
The bells, too, and have done
With all this Twelfth-night toggery
Ere home again I run."

The dogs, save Lass, had vanished,
And when Jem reached his home,
Said Goodwife Tib, "Eh, Jem, my man,
'Tis time that thou should'st come.

"Hast had enough of mumming?
And was the wassail prime?
Thou didst not fool thy goodwife, Jem.
Tib knew thee all the time."

THE VICAR BETHINKS HIMSELF

Soon now the Guests must go their several ways,
For with gay Twelfth Night end the Holidays.
And as he saw the parting hour draw nigh
The Vicar did bethink himself.

"Shall I
Forget my duty who like shepherd am
To these, my flock ev'n to the littlest lamb?"

On went his thought; 'twas good for age and youth
To play and frolic,—good, in very truth;
But better things he knew, and should he not
These things bring forward, lest they be forgot?
Oh, well-spent Twelfth Night, could he sow some seed
That would bear fruit of kindly thought and deed!

But though to preach a sermon was his plan,
The sermon proved a tale, and thus it ran.

THE CAROLER

ONCE on a Christmas Eve when the stars were bright and the wind was sharp, a company of carolers went from door to door singing their songs of Christ and His Nativity.

They were young and gay, and they thought less perhaps of the meaning of their songs than of the wassail folk might give them. Yet it was pleasant to hear their sweet fresh voices ringing in the night with their "Noel! Noel!"

They had sung in the village street and were hastening to the manor-house of a great lord, which stood beyond the town, when one among them called out, "See the star!" And he pointed to a tiny twinkling light that seemed to rest upon a hilltop far away.

"Nay, nay. What ails your eyes that you make star of Widow Talbot's candle-light? You need to come but so far any night to see it shine," cried his companions, laughing at the wonder in his voice.

The first caroler paid little heed to them and their laughter.

"Spark of candle it may be, but, nathless, star it seems," he said; and he stood gazing at the light until a comrade plucked him by the sleeve and asked:

"Would'st rather sing at the Widow's door than at my lord's?"

"'Tis little the Widow Talbot has for wassailing,

poor soul!" said another; "but sing we east or sing we west, we'll never find such Christmas cheer as my lord gives."

"Aye, and last year besides the wassail and the cake, each of us had a shilling," cried a lad; "and my lord came himself to praise our songs and ask the name of Giles who sang first part."

"My lord loves above all things a blithesome song; if we sing well to-night, who knows what we may gain?" said Giles himself who led the company. And at such hopeful words the carolers began to press right earnestly upon their way once more.

The lad who had seen the candle-light went with the rest but he took no part in their chattering. His comrade's question lingered in his mind, and try as he would he could not put it from him:

"Would'st rather sing at the Widow's door than at my lord's? Would'st rather sing at the Widow's door?"—and at last a desire to do this very thing took hold upon him.

My lord was rich and the caroler had need that night. A shilling would mean much to him, and to win my lord's favor more. Not even Giles had voice more tuneful than his own, and he was full of longings for great things.

"Yet will I sing at the Widow Talbot's door for Christ's sweet sake," thought he; and slipping unnoticed from the merry crowd he turned his back upon the lord's great house, and set his face toward the small twinkling candle-light.

The way to the hut where the candle burned was long and rough, but the caroler thought less of this than of his purpose, and with his eyes fixed on the guiding light he climbed the hill and reached his goal in safety.

Then standing at the Widow Talbot's door he sang a carol of the Star that shone on Bethlehem and of the wondrous Child whom kings and shepherds sought. Noel! Noel! Noel!

The Widow Talbot listening forgot that she was poor and old; forgot that she was lone and lorn; forgot all else but joy of the song.

And she was fain to give the caroler a gift. But what? Look where she would in her humble house, from blackened rafter to rush-strewn floor, on wall or cupboard shelf or table, she could spy naught for Christmas gift. But what her eyes could not find, her heart discovered.

"I will give him a blessing," cried the Widow Talbot; and opening wide the door, she held her hand above the singer's head:

"God bless ye, lad,
Where'er ye be;
In town or lea,
'Neath thatch or tree,
On stream or sea,
God bless ye, lad,"

she cried; and the candle in her window was not brighter than her face.

And as for the caroler—his wassail bowl was empty, yet it seemed full; the night was cold but he was warm; the homeward way was long yet never trod he shorter path; he was alone but lonely he was not, for he took with him from the Widow's door a happy heart, which is God's blessing for a loving deed.

THE JOYOUS GUESTS

The stories in this book tell many interesting things about the England of long ago. Some of the stories are based on the life and customs of that time. When you want to read again about some special feature of that life, you can use this index. (Numbers in italics refer to illustrations.)

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